

# FORGING PARENT PARTNERSHIPS

by

Arlene Elsie Mary Racicot

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APPROVAL

Name: Arlene Racicot  
Degree: Master of Education  
Title of Project: Forging Parent Partnerships  
Examining Committee:

Mike Manley-Casimir  
Senior Supervisor

Peter Coleman  
Professor

Bruce Beairsto, B.Sc., M.A.  
Director of Instruction (Curriculum)  
Richmond School District  
External Reader

Date Approved February 13, 1991.

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Author:

(signature)

Arlene Elsie Mary Racicot

(name)

February 13, 1991

(date)

## ABSTRACT

This is a policy oriented paper resulting from the current educational changes described in the Year 2000 documents. The paper reviews present extant literature that addresses the creation of parent school partnerships, a relationship legislated through the School Act (Province of British Columbia, 1990) and mandated through the Primary Program (Province of British Columbia, 1990) and describes an approach one school is evolving to invite greater parent involvement.

In light of the extensive program changes that are currently underway and the significant outcomes research attributes to parent involvement, it might be assumed that participants would welcome the opportunity for a change in relationship. Predictably, however, numerous, complex barriers impact on the formation of parent/school partnerships. This paper describes and discusses five: individual vs. universalistic perspective, socio-economic and cultural barriers, teacher beliefs, territoriality and logistical concerns. Each of these is institutionalized into the culture of schools and in the ways of thinking and doing of both educators and parents. The new relationship described in the Year 2000 documents calls for a shift in the responsibility of educating children from one solely of the professionals to one of shared responsibility. This shift in paradigm from a bureaucratic or traditional stance to one that is collegial requires changes in the culture of the school and in the actions and beliefs of the school staff and the parent community.

This paper describes and discusses eight characteristics for change taken from Fullan's research (1982, 1985). These are: the teacher's recognition of the need for the change; the clarity of the goals and means; the complexity of the change; the practicality of the change in light of all the other demands placed on teachers; interaction and communication; effective administrative leadership of the change process; collaborative planning and implementation and a shared value system. Change in belief usually

accompanies a significant change in action. It produces feelings of anxiety and requires time, energy, commitment and planning. Teachers and parents need to feel that the change addresses an unmet need and that it is clearly articulated and supported in ways that are meaningful. Research (Fullan, 1982 and 1985; Lortie, 1975; Rozenholtz, 1989) indicates that collegial school settings are necessary for school wide change that involves a change in belief as well as a change in action.

Riverside Elementary, a dual track lower mainland elementary school, has a traditional relationship with its parent population. The approach described in this paper provides opportunities for teachers and parents to reflect on past experience, set specific action oriented objectives, form study groups for support and assess attainment of objectives. Although forging parent/school partnerships is a multidimensional, highly complex task, it is one that once in place benefits teachers, parents and most significantly children.

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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

The education system in British Columbia is undergoing major reform as a result of the Royal Commission on Education (1988). Fundamental to the reform is the belief that parents have a right and a responsibility to influence the decisions affecting their child's educational experience. Current Ministry of Education documents including the new School Act (Province of British Columbia, 1990) and the Primary Program (Province of British Columbia, 1990) address both the rights and responsibilities of parents as partners in their child's education. The School Act formalizes parent involvement through the establishment of school based parent advisory councils and grants parents the right to appeal any decision made by an employee of the board which "significantly affects the education, health or safety of a student" (p. 11). Parents now have the legislated right to influence their child's education. The Primary Program: Resource Document (Province of British Columbia, 1990) stresses the need for teachers and administrators to provide opportunities for active and specific parent participation.

The importance of parents in the education of their children cannot be over estimated. Teachers recognize that parents are a child's first teacher and that a partnership between the school and the home can benefit children, parents and teachers. (Province of British Columbia, 1990 p.119)

The Teacher's Community Resource Handbook (Province of British Columbia, 1990), a video package developed by the Ministry to support the new primary program, speaks directly to parents about the significance of their role in the education of their child and provides specific information to parents and educators about the various ways this involvement may occur.

This view of parents as partners in their child's education has gained momentum in educational literature over the past twenty years. The definition of partnership has shifted from one of sharing knowledge about the school experience and developing support for the



system to one where parents directly influence their child's educational experience. Parents, educators, researchers and politicians are intensely interested in strengthening the link between home and school for a variety of reasons.

Storey (1989), in his discussion of the need for a parent partnership, categorizes the reasons as "The Parents' Rights Argument" (p. 29-31), "The Effects Argument" (p. 32), and "The Survival Argument" (p. 33 ). Under Parents Rights', he states that:

Because of their special status beyond that of taxpayer, tuition-fee payer, or both, parents are calling more clearly and persistently than at earlier times for a recognized position as equal and responsible partners in education. . . . A parent, therefore, has the right to act, to be an advocate, on behalf of the child, in order to ensure that the best interests of the child are realized.  
(Storey, 1989, p. 30)

In discussing the effects of parent involvement he cites the mounting volume of evidence that parent involvement influences student achievement. Parents are seen to play a crucial role in establishing the educability of their children and facilitating or remediating their child's development both academically and socially. Finally, in presenting the Survival Argument, he suggests that constituent support is critical to the development and maintenance of quality education within the public school system.

It is clear in the research ( Epstein, 1986; Fullan, 1982; Lareau, 1989; McConkey, 1985; Morrison 1978; Wolfendale, 1989) that parent involvement can have a positive effect on a student's achievement and educational experience. Fullan (1982) identifies the message as "remarkably consistent: the closer the parent is to the education of the child, the greater the impact on child development and school achievement" (p. 193).

Walberg (1984) in his synthesis of 2,575 empirical studies of academic learning found that parents directly or indirectly influenced eight significant determinants of academic, social and behavioral learning. These eight are: student ability, student motivation, the quality of instruction, the amount of instruction, the psychological climate of the classroom, an academically stimulating home environment, a peer group with academic interests, goals

and activities and a minimum of exposure to low grade television (p. 398). The first four are necessary for effective classroom instruction and the last four "benefit learning indirectly by raising student ability, motivation and responsiveness to instruction" (p. 398). Walberg concludes by stating:

improvements by parents and educators in the eight determining factors hold the best hope for improving learning. And, since children spend so much time at home or under the nominal control of parents, altering home conditions and the relations between homes and schools should produce large effects on learning. (Walberg, p. 398)

Fullan (1982), in his literature on the influence of parents on educational change states that most parents are interested in changes which directly relate to their own children (p. 203) and that "most educational changes (at least at the elementary level) would benefit enormously from parents' understanding and participation, and indeed will probably fail to become implemented if parents are ignored or bypassed" (p. 207).

This message is particularly significant for schools in British Columbia at this time given the extensiveness of both the structural and philosophical changes currently underway. The dilemma that most schools face however, is that the necessary foundation of a partnership relationship between home and school does not exist.

Sarason (1982) echoes this conclusion. He states that proponents of a change initiative need to

recognize the importance of constituencies, second, to view power as an opportunity to develop constituencies, and third, to realistically confront the time demands of constituency building. There is a fourth factor: constituency building . . . implies that redefinition of resources has taken place in that the constituents are now viewed as possessing power and resources heretofore unrecognized and unused i.e. their roles have been redefined as has their relationship to educational change. (p. 293)

He feels that the parents as constituents need to have a part in the change process not out of courtesy or legislated rights but with the understanding that only through involvement can they become committed to the change. Embedded in this redefinition of roles is a

commitment to provide the time for the change initiative to become understood and valued. Sarason clearly states that parents need to feel that they have the power to negotiate a restructuring of the change as part of the process of gaining their support. He cautions that although addressing the constituency issue has the potential to diminish the polarization between schools and the community, it is not without obstacles. The two significant barriers he identifies are the difficulty professionals have in sharing responsibility and decision making with non professionals and the extensive amount of time required to create an approximation of a desired change that can be supported by all the stakeholders. This requires a major shift in the way we view the management of change in schools and the specific roles parents can take in the education of their child.

Andrews (1987, p. 157) and Seeley (1989, p. 46) describe the need to include "parents as partners" as a shift in paradigm from a bureaucratic or delegation model to a collegial or partnership model. Andrews (1987) describes early school/community relationships as closely linked where the norms and values of the schools reflected those of the community. From these origins schools evolved into large bureaucratic structures with "clearly defined boundaries between school and community" (p. 152). The primary responsibility of citizens including parents was to pay their taxes and hold professionals accountable for educating the children. This delegation of responsibility has "become institutionalized in the roles, relationships and mindsets not only of school staffs but of parents, students and citizens as well" (Seeley, 1989, p. 46). The paradigm shift calls for a coordinated effort of parents and schools toward a commonly held set of goals. This shift to a partnership relationship is clearly mandated by the Ministry of Education through recent legislation, funding and resourcing. The implementation of the new primary, intermediate and graduation programs requires thoughtful consideration of ways to "change basic

bureaucratic structures, role relationships, attitudes and assumptions" (Seeley, p. 46) in order for partnerships to evolve.

### Problem

Through the study of current research, this paper addresses four questions fundamental to forging a partnership between home and school.

1. What are the significant tensions that exist between parents and teachers as outlined in the current research?
2. What are the conditions for change related to the parent/teacher partnership that need to exist in a school in order for the change to take place?
3. What approach can a school use to create more collegial parent relationships?
4. What conclusions and implications can be drawn from the synthesis of the current research on parent involvement and the implementation of a school based plan?

The interpretations forged from this study will be useful to educators who are responsible for the implementation of the new primary, intermediate and graduation programs in British Columbia.

### Limitations of the Research

This is a policy oriented project resulting from a government initiated educational change. The Royal Commission on Education (Province of British Columbia, 1988) recommended legislated parent involvement. The School Act (Province of British Columbia, 1990) describes the rights and responsibilities parents have in the education of their child. Current Ministry documents such as the Primary Program (Province of British Columbia, 1990) clearly state the significant role parents can play in the academic growth of their child and in the implementation of new programs. The project reviews the knowledge we presently have, therefore, it is primarily a collation, review and synthesis of extant literature.

Coleman (n. d.) defines policy research as different from discipline research in that discipline research "has as its philosophic base the testing and development of theories . . . . [It is] 'conclusion-oriented research' in which the aim is to arrive at certain conclusions about what is, descriptively, the state of affairs. [Policy research] has as its philosophic base a guide to action . . . .[It is] 'decision-oriented research' in which the aim is to provide information that is important for policy decisions that must be made" (Coleman, p. 2). The research question originates in the "world of action and the research results are destined for the world of action" (Coleman, p. 3). It is the intent of this paper to explore current research in order to create a plan of action for a specific school.

A second limitation is that the findings are not necessarily generalizable. They may in fact be so but such judgement is outside the scope of this particular project.

Thirdly, as the writer of the project, I am involved in the exploration of this topic through a variety of different roles: graduate student, writer and vice principal of the school for which the approach plan is designed.

### Organization of the Paper

This paper is organized into five chapters. The first chapter introduces the topic, states the problem, defines the limitations, and outlines the remainder of the research.

Chapter two provides a review of the literature that addresses the tensions between the home and school. It is intended that this chapter provides an insight into the barriers that might need to be addressed in order to forge a partnership between the home and school.

Chapter three describes the paradigm shift necessary in order for partnerships to form. The paper then describes the conditions for change that need to exist for a parent partnership to form. Finally, it describes the relationship between collegial school settings and effective parent involvement.

Chapter four sketches the approach one school is evolving to support the development of the partnership relationship.

Chapter five identifies conclusions and implications that can be drawn from the synthesis of the research on parent partnerships and the implementation of a plan to increase parent involvement in one school.

## CHAPTER 2

### Barriers to Parent Involvement

From the ideal point of view, parents and teachers have much in common, in that both, supposedly, wish things to occur for the best interests of the child; but, in fact, parents and teachers usually live in a condition of mutual distrust and enmity. Both wish the child well, but it is such a different kind of well that conflict must inevitably arise over it. The fact seems to be that parents and teachers are natural enemies, predestined each for the discomfiture of the other. (Waller, 1967, p. 68)

The research (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Epstein, 1986; Lareau, 1989; Lightfoot, 1978; Marjoribanks, 1979) clearly shows that conflicts between home and school are multidimensional and emanate from a variety of factors making parent/teacher partnerships a seemingly elusive goal for educators. For the purposes of this paper, I have categorized the current research under the five headings: Individuality vs. Universality, Socio-economic and Cultural Barriers, Teacher Beliefs, Territoriality and Logistical Concerns. These headings are used to give shape and clarity to my discussion of current literature and yet by the very nature of categorizing, have the potential to simplify the highly complicated, diverse and interconnected variables that affect the interrelationships between home and school, parent and teacher.

#### Individualistic vs. Universalistic Views

Parents and teachers are situated in such different worlds that it "makes it extremely difficult for questions of wonderment and concern to get expressed constructively or even at all" (Fullan, 1982, p. 203). Parents see their child as an individual with specific strengths and weaknesses, past experiences and budding interests. Their view of their child is wholistic and all encompassing with the time at school seen as only part of their child's experience.

This contrasts with the teacher's view of the child as a member of a group defined by the child's age and by curricular expectations. The teacher's role as a socializing agent

reflects a universalistic set of norms and expectations which the teacher attempts to administer to all children in a fair and consistent manner. Conflicts arise between home and school when the parent feels a loss of control of their child's daily life and sees someone else in the position of expert and judge of their child's ability or behavior. Lortie (1975) describes the dilemmas teachers face when a parent requests special treatment for their child or when groups of parents make contradictory requests. "Teachers try to build and sustain social order with people over whom they have only limited and specific place bound authority" (Lortie, p. 189). The very nature of this fragile authority can influence the willingness of teachers to interact with parents.

McPherson (1972) described parent expectations as usually relating to the "amount of work or the difficulty of the presentation rather than the content. . . . Parents did expect the teacher to accept extenuating circumstances for an individual child and to seek out these extenuating circumstances without being prodded by the parent" (p. 131). She found parents rarely asked for more work or criticized a teacher for being too lenient towards their child or for giving marks that were too high. When parents did criticize the curriculum, it was usually for departures from the traditional curriculum or when implementation of new programs was being undertaken. McPherson also found that "when the teacher rejected a parental expectation or demand as illegitimate, she/[he] was defensive and guilty about it. When she [he] grudgingly acknowledged the legitimacy or the innocence of the expectation, she/[he] was still hostile, annoyed by what she called 'interference' and yet afraid to express this hostility. . . . The core of the teacher's expectation was that a parent respond as a teacher did, to be universalistic, which meant to be objective, rational and realistic about the child" (p. 134).

Lightfoot (1978) identifies the two perspectives as "functionally diffuse" (p. 21) (parent) and "functionally specific" (p. 22) (teacher). She states that it is imperative to a



child's academic growth that the teacher understand the learning environment of the home and that the parents understand the learning environment of the school.

In order to fully capture family-school interactions, families need to be seen as educative environments. . . .In order to effectively attend to children in one setting, the adult sponsors would have to be aware of life in the other, see the child's experience as continuous, and seek an integration of educational realms. (Lightfoot, cited in Fullan, 1982, p. 204)

Efforts to bridge the universalistic norms of the school with a parent's individualistic view of the child are not without problems. Tensions arise when teachers find themselves involved in discussions with parents about issues or problems which the teacher feels ill equipped to handle. ". . . [W]hen parents present schools with complex or near-insurmountable problems [originating in the home], . . . Teachers often do not have the training and/or the support to cope and many may draw up an arbitrary line of defense to keep the problems away" (Wolfendale, 1989, p. 39 -40). The primary goal of school is the intellectual growth of students. Teachers in preparation for an achievement oriented society grade students in comparison with others. These "teacher judgements may shock or repel parents particularly if they have idealized their child's abilities" (Lortie, p. 185).

The new primary and intermediate programs direct teachers to develop classroom experiences that respond to the diverse needs of individual students. This has the potential to align parent and teacher goals more closely.

### Socio-economic and Cultural Barriers

Most parents want to understand their child's education and to play an active part. Research indicates, however, that the way parents define their involvement is strongly influenced by their socio-economic and/or cultural background (Epstein, 1986; Green, 1965; Griffiths & Hamilton, 1984; Lareau, 1989; Lightfoot, 1978; Marjoribanks, 1979; Wolfendale, 1989).

Lareau (1989) in her study of home/school relationships in two schools of distinctly different socio-economic settings concluded that the socio-economic status of parents significantly influenced the type of parent involvement that took place, the resources that parents had at their disposal to meet teachers' requests and the degree of involvement schools permitted.

She identified teacher goals for parent involvement as similar in both schools. Parents were to ensure that their child was punctual, well mannered, appropriately behaved and demonstrated a responsible attitude. Both teacher groups asked their parents to maintain an at home reading program and to help their child with homework.

She found parents with lower socio-economic status had less direct school contact, greater willingness to see the teacher as the expert and more concern with their child fitting into the norms and values set by the school. They were less likely to see education as a life long experience. Parents were willing to comply with specific homework requests made by the school but generally knew very little about their child's program and the specific indicators for success.

In contrast, the parents with upper socio-economic status demanded greater parent authority and involvement in program decisions, wanted more access to educational information, were less willing to accept teacher autonomy and were more judgmental of teaching practices. Both of these home/school relationships create implicit and diverse tensions between parents and teachers.

In the lower socio-economic setting, although the teachers appreciated professional autonomy, they felt isolated from their students' lives. They felt that this isolation limited the level of success that they could achieve with their students because parents rarely came to school and when they did, they gave little insight into their child which would have aided in program planning, problem solving etc. Lareau attributes this to parent insecurity in the

presence of perceived authority and to teachers' judgements of parents' ability to participate based on the teachers' socio-economic stereotyping. Lortie (1975) found in an earlier study that similar attitudes were prevalent. In the lower socio-economic schools 88% of the teachers wanted more parent contact in contrast to 23% in the higher socio-economic schools. "In lower status schools parents are less likely to respond to teachers invitations to come in and discuss the student, in the higher status schools parents are likely to show up without invitation" or appointment (Lortie, p. 190).

McPherson (1972) found that parents who adopted a humble manner were likely sought out by the teacher for a coalition. "Unfortunately parental humility sometimes led to unfortunate misunderstandings. The teacher grateful for the parent's admiration and respect for her/[him] as the true gatekeeper to mobility, often found it hard to tell the parent the truth about the child's capabilities and performance. . . . The parent's unawareness of the brutal truth stemmed also from the fact that he [/she] did not understand the teacher's terminology. . . so when the parent came face to face with the child's failure in later years he/[she] ultimately felt hostile toward the subsequent teacher" (p. 140). In this way the legacy of parent/school tensions is perpetuated.

In the upper middle class schools, the teachers and the administration felt their autonomy threatened. The principal spoke of needing to protect her staff as well as addressing issues raised by parents. Parents saw education as a shared responsibility both by enriching and monitoring education at home and also by attempting to influence decisions in the school. Upper middle class parents saw direct involvement in their child's education both as a right and responsibility and they spoke of the frustration felt in their efforts to meet their individual child's needs. To many of them the school was not responsive to this type of input. McPherson (1972) found teachers who were dealing with upper-class or more educated parents were less likely to attempt coalitions and more focused on narrowing the

status gap and reducing their own feelings of status inferiority. Teachers in this setting seemed constantly in the process of rebuilding their self image.

Lareau concluded that teachers in both schools wanted a "parent/client relationship" (p. 35 ) that was interconnected with the teachers controlling the amount and type of interconnectedness. The teachers did not want parents to monitor their decisions or to try to influence the childrens' school experience. The changes called for in the educational reforms in British Columbia require that educators relinquish this traditional view of the role of parents.

Bryans (cited in Wolfendale, 1989) in his discussion of home/school relationships in primary schools in Britain described the potential for clashes between the goals of a program and the cultural values of the parent community. The British primary program is similar to the new primary program in British Columbia in focusing on each child as an individual and supporting the continuous growth of the child in the four domains of personal, social, emotional and academic development. Bryans found that the goals of the program conflicted with the explicit religious and/or cultural values of some of the families involved in his study. Some communities have a wide variety of cultural or religious values that reflect different expectations about the function of schools. "Parents encouraged on one level to come into the classrooms and schools, often do not like what they see there. But it is only a very small minority who ever feel empowered to voice their concerns to a member of the teaching staff" (p. 38). These unspoken yet fundamental differences in values and in the perceived role of school create wide chasms between home and school.

#### Teacher Beliefs

Other researchers (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Epstein, 1986) while acknowledging that socio-economic and cultural factors can influence the degree and type of parent involvement,

suggest that it is the teacher's willingness to create partnerships that is the more significant variable in parent participation. Epstein (1986) distinguishes teachers as having one of two dominant perspectives.

One perspective emphasizes the inherent incompatibility, competition and conflict between families and schools and supports the separation of the two institutions . . . . The distinct goals [of the two institutions] are achieved most efficiently and effectively when teachers maintain their professional, general standards and judgements about the children in their classrooms and when parents maintain their personal, particularity standards and judgements about their children at home. The opposing perspective emphasizes the coordination and complimentarity of schools and families and encourages communication and collaboration between the two institutions. It assumes that schools and families share responsibilities for the socialization and the education of the child. (p. 277)

Epstein's (1986) research explored the connections between the teacher's orientation (separation or cooperation) and parents' perceptions of their ability and responsibility to help their child's academic growth. Teachers with a cooperative orientation provided consistent ongoing at home learning opportunities for all students, irrespective of the parents' educational background and were willing to work with parents to improve their helping skills. She found that 85% of the parents helped their child with homework fifteen minutes a day and that most would help more if they knew what to do. Parents who worked in a cooperative relationship with teachers "were more aware of the teachers' efforts, received more ideas from teachers, knew more about their child's instructional program, and rated the teachers higher in interpersonal skills and overall teaching quality" (p. 291). She also found that "fewer and fewer teachers helped parents become involved as the students advanced through the elementary grades. Thus, parents' repertoires of helping skills are not developed and improved over school years"(p. 291). Epstein concludes that almost all parents want to be involved in learning activities at home, that most are irrespective of the teacher's instruction or assistance and that most parents would benefit from specific teacher direction that would enhance their child's academic growth. Home/school tensions increase as parents

who have experienced or observed a teacher with a cooperative orientation are confronted with one whose dominant orientation is the separation of home and school.

Epstein (1986) and Becker and Epstein (1982) found that teachers who were hesitant to form partnerships were also more likely to stereotype parents based on their socio-economic status, viewing upper and lower class parents as most problematic for different reasons. Upper class or well educated parents were seen either as threats to teacher autonomy or were assumed not to need assistance in providing at home educational opportunities for their children. Conversely, lower class parents were seen as unwilling or unable to be effectively involved.

Lightfoot (1978) states that stereotypical views of parents are "deeply embedded in public imagery and become part of the defensive posturing of educational practitioners" (p. 35). Her research indicated most teachers viewed both black and poor parents as not valuing education, yet in her interviews with parents who fit one or both categories she found education of their children one of their highest values. Parents felt intimidated by the school setting, rarely communicated directly with the teacher about their educational goals for their children or sought specific assistance in how to help their child at home. Unlike parents from other socio-economic groups, parents with lower socio-economic status were most frequently contacted by the school because of their child's poor academic success or negative behavior. She described these parents as feeling judged and being isolated from positive home/school relationships.

Lareau (1989) described the stereotypical view some teachers had of upper middle class parents. These parents were viewed as pushing their children to succeed at the expense of the child's childhood. The teachers responded to this perception by taking the role of child protector and not setting at home expectations nor clearly reflecting to the parent the child's performance.

### Territoriality

Much of the research on parent/teacher relationships describes the conflict between teacher autonomy and parent authority as both the home and school struggle for clarity about who should be in control of the child's life at school (Lareau, 1989; Lightfoot, 1989; Waller, 1967). The struggle is rarely articulated, clarified or resolved. Lightfoot (1978) uses the word "territoriality" (p. 26) to describe "the ambiguous gray areas of authority and responsibility between teachers and parents [that] exacerbates the distrust between them" (p. 26). She suggests that schools have institutionalized ways of establishing boundaries between home and school by providing few opportunities for meaningful substantive discussions. Most invitations for parent involvement take the form of fundraising, open houses, Parent Advisory groups, field trip support or school concerts. Parent conferences, although depicted as opportunities for parents and teachers to have meaningful exchanges, rarely are. The time limitations, the focus on the written report card, and the typical grouping of numerous interviews on the same day usually result in teachers presenting information and parents receiving it. The term interview itself has a formal business like connotation that does not encourage open discussion. Griffiths and Hamilton (1984) describe the conferencing experience from the perspective of middle class and working class parents. These parents have the image of the teacher as the authority figure and schools as places of discipline and punishment. From their personal past experience with an institution "geared so that the majority of children must fail to meet its standards . . . most parents . . . know consciously or otherwise, that they themselves have 'failed' in the school's terms" (Griffiths & Hamilton, 1984, p. 17). The parents' perception of school and of the teacher as expert create barriers to open and frank discussions and to requests for specific involvement

in their child's learning. Parents fear challenging the teacher might negatively impact on the teacher's acceptance of their child or might alienate them from other parents.

The reality is that teacher autonomy is very fragile and many teachers fear that involving parents diminishes teacher authority (Lareau, 1989; Lightfoot, 1978). The classroom door provides teachers with some sense of autonomy and therefore, teachers can be very unwilling to let parents become familiar with their program or to become involved in the classroom experience in a meaningful way. This is particularly true when teachers are embarking on a curricular change or when their teaching style differs from the norm of the school. Teachers cite a variety of concerns when parent involvement is discussed. These include concerns that parents will push children too hard, that parents will instruct their children the wrong way, that parents will be critical of the program or the school or that inequalities between students might increase due to the quality and amount of help each child might receive.

Lightfoot (1978) identifies two types of teacher authority based on the teachers' sense of competence and their perceived need for institutional protection: positional authority which is granted to the teacher through the socially recognized position held or personal authority which is granted to individuals because of their charisma, personality and expertise (p. 30). Teachers with positional authority might seek institutional protection against the perceived aggression of parents or in culturally or socio-economically different settings from their own personal background, they might see isolating the school experience from the home as a form of child advocacy. Lightfoot states that when administrators support the positional authority of system loyalists they create strong barriers to institutional innovation and change as well as to parent involvement. "Administrators who support, encourage and reward personal authority will probably encourage teachers to engage in relationships with parents that do not depend on the protection of institutional barriers" (Lightfoot, 1978, p.



30). Teachers who are confident in their professional status and communicative abilities will probably be more open to involving parents as partners in the education of their child. The recent changes in British Columbia require that teachers develop moral authority.

### Logistical Concerns

Fullan (1982) identifies a number of logistical barriers to parent involvement.

Teachers or administrators receive little or no pre-service training in how to work or cope with parents. Most new program changes do not contain ideas about how to involve parents . . . or how to protect the program from inappropriate interference by small minorities of parents. Students as they get older do not want parents to interfere. . . the daily grind and pressures to survive crowd out good intentions. (p. 206)

Marjoribanks (1979) details the type of pre-service or in-service that teachers need in order to develop effective parent partnerships. The extensiveness and complexity of the suggestions demonstrates the high cost in time and energy required to prepare for effective parent involvement which may be perceived by many teachers as beyond their ability, given the already overwhelming demands on them.

Teachers need to be made aware of: (a) the mechanisms of parent-teacher projects that have been successes or failures; (b) the nature of the social-psychological processes that operate in families, classrooms, and peer groups to affect children's schooling related performances; (c) the skills and knowledge required to create adult-oriented curricula; (d) the psychological and linguistic processes operating to influence children's cognitive and language development; and (e) the possibilities, but also the difficulties, in attempting to affect family characteristics such as parents' aspirations, the reading habits of the family, parent-child activeness within the family, or parents' achievement-oriented values. (Marjoribanks, 1979, p. 200)

Bryans (cited in Wolfendale, 1989) identifies the architecture of the school as another barrier to parent involvement. The institutional atmosphere created by long hallways, closed doors and the officialdom of the office can easily intimidate parents.

### Conclusion

The tension between parents and teachers and the difficulties that arise as both groups strive to forge educational partnerships have various origins. "The issue is not to make this tension disappear, but to recognize that these phenomenological differences are among the most powerful barriers to and resources for change" (Fullan, 1982, p. 205).

The role of parents and their right to influence their child's education has changed substantively over the past fifty years. In 1932, Waller described how the conflict between parents and teachers positively influenced the growth of the child.

Parent-teacher work has usually been directed at securing for the school the support of the parents, that is, at getting parents to see children more or less as teachers see them. But it would be a sad day for childhood if parent-teacher work ever really succeeded in its object. The conflict between parents and teachers is natural and inevitable, and it may be more or less useful. It may be that the child develops better if he is treated impersonally in the schools, provided the parents are there to supply the needed personal attitudes . . . . But it would assuredly be unfortunate if teachers ever succeeded in bringing parents over completely to their point of view. (Waller, 1967, p. 69)

Lightfoot (1978) stated that "dissonance between family and school . . . is not only inevitable in a changing society; it also helps to make children more malleable and responsive to a changing world" (p. 39). She goes on to say that parents and teachers work best together when they understand and respect each other's role. Both parents and teachers need to be educated to expect and to tolerate a level of creative tension. An honest partnership can only develop when the family's role is supported and valued and when the teacher feels competent and has positive self-esteem.

Fullan (1982) cited the research of numerous sociologists to support his statement that the family's learning environment has the strongest influence on children's learning and that those programs which have directly included parent involvement have harnessed a powerful educational force. Epstein (1986) has shown that there is a very large parent population that is calling for specific guidance and opportunity to be involved in their child's

education. Lareau (1989) states that there is a wide variety of home/school interactions possible and that one of the key factors in planning home/school connections is to look at the socio-economic background of parents and to institute ways of activating parent involvement.

The primary responsibility of schools is the intellectual growth of children. The psychic reward identified most frequently by teachers is the academic progress of their students (Lortie, 1975; Rosenholtz, 1989). Research has shown that direct, specific parent involvement in the education of their child positively influences the child's academic and social growth. Clearly then, parents are a powerful and in most cases an untapped educational resource. Schools need to make parent participation an integral part of their school culture.

Parents can also strongly influence the success of change initiatives. In light of the current legislation in British Columbia, recognition of this influence is imperative. Sarason (1982) suggests that

the more committed more groups are to a proposed change, the more likely the goals of change will be approximated. . . . The recognition that parents and other community groups should be involved in the change process is tantamount to redefining them as resources i.e. to see them as possessing power and knowledge essential to the change process and capable of understanding and contributing to the substance and the process of change. The more differentiated the constituencies related to the change the greater the likelihood that the adverse consequences of limited resources will be diluted. (p. 295)

By altering the role parents play in the education of their child we are shifting the responsibility from solely that of the professionals to one of shared responsibility. Developing the relationship of shared responsibility is time consuming and frequently frustrating as there are many perspectives to consider and address. Sarason concludes, however, that the perceived lack of efficiency caused by including more players in the implementation of change needs to be contrasted with the disillusioning failure of the

traditional model of developing, proclaiming, legislating and implementing a policy of change" (p. 296). This failure has in the past increased the tensions between school and community.

Given the commitment that primary teachers in British Columbia have for the new primary program, it would be unfortunate if the implementation were less than successful due to neglect of one of the key constituents - parents. Knowing this, numerous school districts have endeavored to include parent orientation as part of their overall implementation plan. In the district for which these strategies are being developed, discussions with parents have been and continue to be held. The local newspaper as well as specific district produced flyers have been used as a vehicle to highlight the changes called for in the Year 2000 paper and supporting documents. In this way the district alerts parents to the changes underway and provides some clarity as to how the changes may play themselves out over time. The significant discussions, however, will take place at each school or in the neighbourhood as parents try to create an image of what the change means specifically for their child and to develop a sense of its worthiness. It is important to the success of the change that parents feel safe in raising their questions and concerns as well as delving into the beliefs and practical applications with school staff. Opportunities for meaningful dialogue will largely depend on the value the school places on including parents in the change process.

## CHAPTER 3

### Conditions For Change

#### Paradigm Shift

Seeley (1989) and Andrews (1987) state that it will take a shift in paradigm from a bureaucratic model to a collegial model on the part of educators, parents, students and community if parents are to become partners in the education of their child. The bureaucratic model reflects society's belief that schools are delegated the responsibility of educating children and is a deeply established cultural tradition.

Schools were initially small, community based establishments reflecting the norms and values of those they served. As the system grew, bureaucratic structures were put in place that defined the roles, rights and responsibilities of those involved and created a fundamental barrier between home and school.

Seeley identifies two beliefs that create the gap between families and schools: parents feel that they do not have to be nor have the right to be involved in their child's education in more than a custodial role. The teacher as the professional, is the delegated authority and sees parent involvement as an interference. Information in this model flows in one direction, from the teacher as professional to the parent as client. Over the years, however,

the structure of the community has changed from simple and hierarchical to complex and multifaceted. Segments of the community not only are disengaged from schools, but often are adversarial in their relationships with them. There are conflicting values and differing expectations for schools among the various community groups. (Andrews, 1982, p. 152)

Andrews goes on to say that business, government and the community are demanding greater input into educational policy decisions because of the perceived links to the economy and to the general health of communities and other geographic entities. Other factors cited are the general decline in the trust in elected school officials, the shrinking percentage of school age children, the more educated parent population, the feelings of

alienation in minority populations, the recognition of cultural and ethnic differences, identified concerns over the cost and quality of the education children are receiving and renewed interest in participatory democracy (Andrews, 1987; Epstein, 1987; Lightfoot, 1978; Seeley, 1989).

"We are confronted, then, with the need to discover and implement new policies and practices, as well as to change basic structures, roles, relationships, attitudes, and assumptions" (Seeley, 1989, p. 46). Both Andrews and Seeley say that it is time for a new paradigm in which parent partnership is a necessity and where communication between home and school would flow both ways.

It is this new paradigm of Parents as Partners that the government of British Columbia is stressing in the reforms currently being undertaken. Parents in British Columbia, through the Royal Commission have called for legitimate ways to have greater input into decisions that affect their child. The new School Act (Province of British Columbia, 1990) provides parents with this right and responsibility. The new School Act states that

A Parent's Advisory Committee through its elected officers may advise the Board and the Principal and Staff of the School or the Provincial School respecting any matter relating to the School or the Provincial School. (Province of British Columbia, 1989, p. 19)

Where a decision of an employee of a board significantly affects the education, health or safety of a student, the parent of the student or the student may, within a reasonable time from the date that the parent or student is informed of the decision, appeal that decision to the board. (Province of British Columbia, 1989, p. 20)

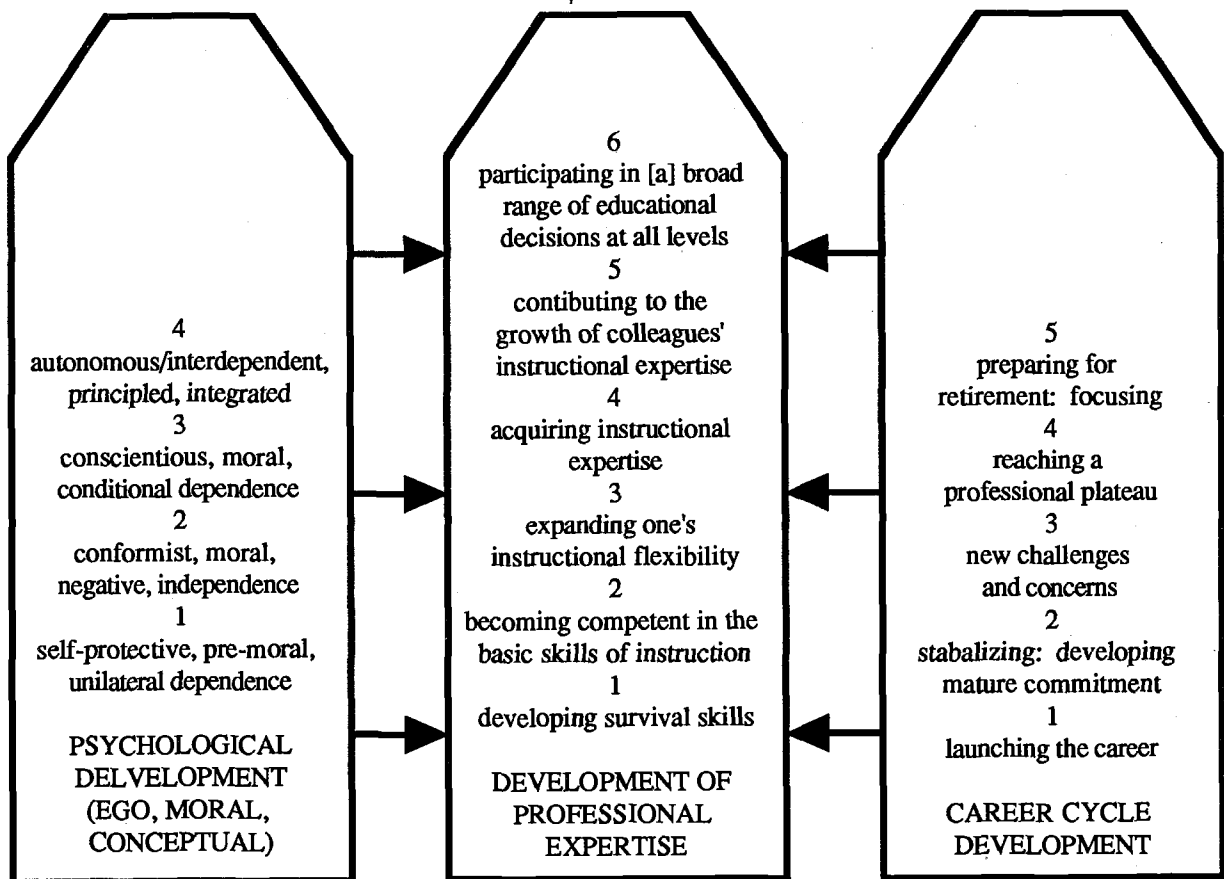
School Boards are being asked to adopt policies and procedures providing designated roles for the parents and other community members through membership on parent-community advisory committees at a district level. An Education Advisory Council including parent representation has been set up by the Ministry of Education for the purpose of advising the Minister on matters affecting curriculum development, implementation and

evaluation. The new Primary Program (Province of British Columbia, 1990) also explicitly calls for specific, ongoing parent involvement.

Accumulated research (Epstein, 1986; Fullan, 1982; Rosenholtz, 1989) over the past twenty years has shown that parent involvement positively influences student achievement and parent's attitude toward their child's school experience. A variety of strategies have been described that strengthen parent involvement. The encouragement for such relationships is found explicitly stated in Ministry documents.

The shift in paradigm from a bureaucratic to a collegial setting requires a change in the culture of the school and in the belief and actions of the school staff. Numerous researchers (Fullan, 1982; Lortie, 1975; Rosenholtz, 1989; Sarason, 1982; Smith & Scott, 1990) have attempted to describe the subjective world of the teacher and the behaviors institutionalized in the complex social organization of the school. "Change at the individual level is a process whereby individuals alter their way of thinking and doing. It is a process of developing new skills and above all finding new meaning and satisfaction in new ways of doing and thinking" (Fullan, 1985, p. 396). It is multidimensional and subjective in that the perception of the change varies between individuals and groups and strongly impacts on teacher's perceptions of their role, their competence and their self concept.

Leithwood (1989) describes teacher development as having three dimensions: "development of professional expertise, psychological development and career cycle development" (p. 3) with specific stages of development embedded within each dimension.



INTERRELATED DIMENSIONS OF TEACHER DEVELOPMENT  
(Leithwood, 1989, p. 17)

These dimensions are interrelated and significant to those responsible for ongoing teacher development as they characterize the complexity of the change process. Understanding where teachers may be in their professional growth provides change agents with the opportunity to introduce the change in a way that is meaningful to individuals.

Real change always involves loss, anxiety and struggle as teachers reshape their occupational reality. This struggle needs to be valued and addressed if teachers are to develop a deep understanding of the meaning of the change. In shifting the way schools view parents' roles, teachers are asked to change their beliefs in the role parents can and have a right to play in the education of their child.



Doyle and Ponder (1977-1978) in their article on the practical considerations teachers use to evaluate the potential consequences of a change, identify three variables that strongly influence teacher receptivity to change: the congruence of the change with the teacher's beliefs; the cost of the change in terms of a "ratio between [the] amount of return and the amount of investment" (p. 8), and the instrumentality or the direct classroom value the teacher anticipates from the change. Administrators who are endeavoring to create tighter links between parents and teachers may need to look at the dominant orientation that teachers use to view parent involvement (Epstein, 1989) and to provide the necessary evidence of the value of working with parents in a systematic way.

As educators, we also need to step into the shoes of the parent, to anticipate their questions and concerns. Using the language of Doyle and Ponder, we need to look at the "congruence" of the beliefs of the parent community and that of the school and at the perceived costs of involvement from the perspective of the parent. We need to anticipate how the answers to these questions might impact on the type of specific relationships that can be fostered.

The remainder of this chapter uses Fullan's (1982, 1985) research to discuss the conditions of change that need to be in place for home/school partnerships to develop and will look briefly at how collegial school cultures support parent involvement. Fullan (1985) describes two types of change: innovation focused strategies and school wide strategies and points out that both imply improvement through deliberate means. Creating and sustaining parent partnerships would be described by Fullan as a school wide strategy. "The essential difference compared with innovation strategy [incorporating a new program into school practice] is that the school wide strategy . . . engages the whole staff . . . and attempts to alter some of the organizational . . . conditions as a means to instructional improvement. As such, it is much more difficult and time consuming" (Fullan, 1985, p. 413). Some of the

elements Fullan highlights in reviewing successful school wide change are school ownership of the change, provision of additional funding with schools having discretionary power over the specific utilization of the funds, the administrator(s) as well as core groups within the schools providing leadership in the attainment of the goal, and districts providing support and pressure to achieve the goal.

Fullan (1982, 1985) identifies fifteen "characteristics affecting implementation" (1982, p. 56) as well as eight "organizational factors" (1985, p. 400) and four "process factors" (1985, p. 400) affecting change. There is obvious overlap between the three lists. For the purposes of this paper, I have looked in detail at four characteristics affecting implementation: the teacher's recognition of the need for the change; the clarity of the goals and means; the complexity of the change and the practicality of the change in light of all the other demands placed on teachers. I have also looked at four process factors: effective administrative leadership of the change process; a shared value system; interaction and communication and collaborative planning and implementation (Fullan, 1982, 1985). I have embedded in the description of the conditions of change the eight organizational factors as well as the remaining characteristics affecting implementation that are relevant to parent partnerships.

I have also looked extensively at Rosenholtz' study (1989) of 78 elementary schools in Tennessee. She analyzed the social organization of three types of schools; routine (traditional), non-routine (collegial) and schools that bridge the two. She looked in detail at the impact of schools' social organization on student and teacher performance, on teacher receptivity to change, on parent/school relationships and on the climate of the school. Her work supports the belief that collegial schools are more responsive to and successful with change initiatives. She also found that parent/school relationships in the collegial setting were more welcomed and effective in enhancing student growth and parent and student

attitudes toward the school. In describing the development of a collegial school, she identified four significant factors:

1. collectively generating specific shared goals;
2. developing a like-minded staff through recruitment procedures and orientation;
3. supporting the norm of collegiality; and
4. incorporating collegial expectations into evaluation.

These factors are consistent with Fullan's description of characteristics of effective schools.

### Conditions Affecting Change

Teachers need to be willing participants in the change process if implementation is to be successful. The initial critical question Fullan (1982) identifies is whether the change is desirable in relation to other goals teachers see as significant. "Does the change address an unmet need? Is it a priority in relation to other unmet needs? Are there adequate . . . resources committed to support implementation" (Fullan, 1982, p. 89)? Teachers need to view the change as being worth the effort in order for a change to be implemented. This is particularly important in policy implementation. Parent partnerships is a policy mandated by the Ministry of Education. Like most policies, it is stated at a general level "making it easier for local districts to adopt the policy in principle but problems emerge in the implementation stage" as schools struggle to create meaning in the change and formulate plans of action (Fullan, 1982, p. 50). Fullan cautions that "the political and symbolic value of adoption [of policies] for schools is often of greater significance than the educational merit and the time and cost necessary for implementation follow through" (Fullan, 1982, p. 50). Past experience may have indicated to teachers that adoption of policy does not necessarily signal a need for implementation. Understanding and articulating the rationale for the adoption of the policy of parent partnerships in ways that encourage implementation is a necessary first

step in the implementation of a new policy. Rosenholtz (1989) identifies the development of specific, agreed upon goals and plans of action, though neither static nor retractable, as fundamental to development of a collegial school climate. She also found that teachers more consistently viewed themselves as learners and consequently were more willing to recognize a need when working in a collegial setting. In contrast, in traditional school settings goals were general and the norm was self-reliance. Teachers set their own goals which strengthened teacher isolation and negated opportunities for school wide change.

Clarity is another necessary characteristic of change. "lack of clarity - diffuse goals and unspecified means of implementation - represents a major problem at the implementation stage; teachers and others find that the change is simply not very clear as to what it means in practice" (Fullan, 1982, p. 57). The lack of clarity that is typical of educational policy results in a need for extensive dialogue and analysis in order for teachers to formulate strategies for implementation. The Ministry has attempted to provide greater clarity to parent partnerships through specific statements in the Primary Program as well as providing a video kit titled Primary Program Taking the Pulse. Altering the roles parent's play in the education of their child is a complex policy change that defies rational step by step planning. Clarity will be gained over time as participants implement strategies that create a closer relationship between home and school and then reflect on the outcomes. Rosenholtz (1989) found that in collegial schools individual teacher's strengths were part of the shared knowledge of the school. Specific teachers were then more readily accessed by the staff to enhance clarity and provide peer leadership.

"Complexity refers to the difficulty and extent of change required of the individuals responsible for implementation. . . . While complexity creates problems for implementation, it may result in greater change because more is being attempted" (Fullan, 1982, p. 58). Creating a partnership relationship is a highly complex change usually requiring a change in

belief as well as a change in practice on the part of both parents and teachers. Changes in belief are the most difficult type of change in that they

challenge the core values held by individuals regarding the purposes of education, moreover, beliefs are often not explicit, discussed or understood, but rather are buried at the level of unstated assumptions. And the development of a clear belief system is essential because it provides a set of criteria for overall planning and a screen for sifting valuable from not so valuable. . . opportunities. (Fullan, 1982, p. 35)

If a shift in beliefs does not occur, a change can become a superficial endorsement of goals and even an imitating of behaviors but in relation to creating new relationships with parents, the incongruity of practice that would inevitably occur could result in a falseness that parents would discern. At the same time, it is important for change agents to know that a shift in belief does not necessarily occur at the beginning of a change. When broad school wide change is undertaken teachers may participate with various levels of commitment. Opportunities for teachers to dialogue about the change at the level of teacher beliefs needs to be provided and valued throughout the change process.

When addressing complexity, a significant factor is whether the change is introduced all at once or through more incremental components. Fullan's (1982) research indicates that where the implementation of major changes were addressed as a series of specific components, greater success was achieved. "In brief, difficult changes are attempted because they have the potential to achieve greater benefits, but they must also be done in a way which maximizes clarity (through defining specific components and implementing them incrementally)" (Fullan, 1982, p. 59). One of the key roles that facilitators of the change have is to identify various starting points while maintaining a clear vision of the complexity of the change.

The practicality of the change refers to the support teachers are provided and the cost of the change in teacher time, energy and commitment as compared to the perceived gains. The practicality of the change needs to be identified and agreed on by the individuals

involved in the change early in the process in order to sustain interest. For this to occur, teachers need time and support in sharing their situational knowledge and expertise, in becoming aware of and familiar with the available resources and to reflect on current practice in order to build the beliefs, skills and understandings that the change embodies. Teachers need to see the change as attainable and worthwhile within the context of their own personal sense of their role and their goals for their students. Teachers' self esteem can significantly influence their willingness to take part in collaborative activities and to address collaborative goals. Collegial schools increase teacher certainty about their own practice (Rosenholtz, 1989).

Research (Doggett, 1987; Firestone & Wilson, 1985; Fullan, 1982; Lortie, 1975; Rosenholtz, 1989) describes the significant role the principal plays in implementation. The bureaucratic structures which are historically in place in schools do not support a partnership relationship between parents and teachers. The principal in consultation with the teachers and parents, may have to define roles, rules and authority relations that will make up the new bureaucratic links. Fullan (1982) points out that one of the dilemmas that both teachers and parents face is not having a clear understanding of their role in the new relationship. Little (1984) cautions us that role definitions must be seen as plausible by the people for whom the role is being designed. Parents or teachers may negate a role purely because it is "too radical a departure from their view" (Fullan, 1982, p. 89) of what being a parent or a teacher is.

In their discussion of cultural linkages, Firestone and Wilson (1985) point out the significant role the principal plays in creating and sustaining the culture of the school. If part of that culture is to include parents as instructional partners, then the principal needs to consciously plan for that. He/she needs to have a clear vision of the partnership and the role that parents can play, to set in place the bureaucratic linkages that can support the parent

involvement and to communicate the vision, thus enabling parents to join the teachers in taking ownership of it.

Fullan (1985) describes it as a "feel for the process on the part of leadership" (p. 400). He states that the numerous various factors that administrators must contend with in managing an organizational change defies step by step rational planning.

Processes of improvement are intrinsically paradoxical and subtle . . . . An effective leader must be the master of two ends of the spectrum; ideas at the highest level of abstraction and actions at the most mundane level of detail . . . . Managing and facilitating improvement involve a way of thinking about an improvement process that draws on knowledge about the major factors associated with success but employs them in a non mechanical manner along with intuition, experience and an assessment of the situation as a whole. It is simultaneously having and using knowledge about factors common to success and possessing the orientation and ability to view each situation to a certain extent as unique. (Fullan, 1985, pp. 400-401)

Leithwood's (1989) description of effective principals parallels Fullan's. Highly effective principals base their decisions and actions on a relatively consistent set of criteria.

They can

articulate direct and remote links between their actions and the instructional system. . . . As a result, the effects of the many seemingly trivial, unrelated and often unanticipated decisions made by these principals eventually add up to something; their impact accumulates in a way that consistently fosters school improvement. This is held together by the goals they and their staff have developed and a sense of what the school must look like and do in order to accomplish these goals. (pp. 14-15)

Visionary administrators create opportunities for both formal and informal dialogue, acknowledge in explicit and contextually valued ways the work of the participants and build discussions of the change into recruitment and evaluation. "In part what a teacher takes to be real is socially constructed" (Rosenholtz, 1989, p. 39). The principal plays a significant role in shaping the school reality and constructing school beliefs and values. Through discussion of school goals and relationships with potential staff members, the principal begins to set expectations for new teachers and "to create the 'correct' ideas, values, goals and ways of thinking and behaving that make up the culture of the school" (Rosenholtz, 1989, p. 17).

Through clear articulation of expectations, modelling of expected behaviors, telling stories and providing advice and direction, the principal represents school expectations. Collegial principals also recognize the significant role peers play in the socialization of new teachers and maximize opportunities to link new staff with experienced teachers who have invested positively in the direction of the school. This acknowledges expertise of the staff and supports the notion of collegial goal setting.

Another major enabling factor Fullan (1985) identifies is a shared, explicit, value system that is present in the culture of the school and that philosophically supports the change. These values are "high expectations for students, commonly shared goals and a strong sense of community. The instructional mission of the school is valued as primary, along with clear rules, genuine caring about individuals, collegiality and commitment to quality through examination of detail (solid, specific information) and continuous improvement" (p. 402). Rosenholtz (1989) found that teachers in collegial settings were more likely to see potential in all students. She also found that collegial schools managed student behavior collectively and from a positive stance, thus developing a school focused staff rather than a group of classroom focused teachers. Without this collegial support, she found management a major emphasis for teachers and a barrier to interaction with peers, administrators and parents. The development and maintenance of a positive learning environment is fundamental to effective instruction and student growth. The lack of consistent norms of behavior results in a lack of unity and shared values. Instead of a collective and therefore predictable image of the school, parents are presented with a collection of images defined by individual teachers. It is thus difficult for parents to feel confident that teachers' hold a consistent and accurate view of how childrens' intellectual and emotional growth occurs when the basic behavioral goals appear to be viewed so differently.



Research (Fullan, 1982; Glickman, 1985; Joyce & Weil, 1986; Little, 1984) indicates that opportunities for intense interaction and communication on the part of teachers, administrators, facilitators and others on a sustained basis toward a specific objective forms the basis for integrating the change into current practice. Continual focus on the identified change, collegial support and peer pressure motivates individuals to become involved and to sustain interest. A positive cohesiveness amongst staff exemplifies the belief that everyone involved is a learner. Building cohesiveness requires teacher talk time, a safe environment to explore concerns and doubts and a valuing of risk taking.

Research (Fullan, 1982, 1985; Joyce & Weil, 1986; Leithwood, 1989; Little, 1984; Rosenholtz, 1989) also indicates that collaborative planning and implementation are important characteristics of effective change processes. Central office can and frequently does play a significant role by identifying and explicitly supporting the change "by providing direction, assistance, and prodding and by expecting and asking for results" (Fullan, 1985, p. 403). District support combined with school based collegial decision making on adaptation and implementation of the change will strengthen both the purpose and perceived value. In complex changes such as creating parent partnerships, the relationship between top-down and bottom-up is complicated by the length of time involved and the flexibility required to support the continual redefining that occurs in the school as the change gains clarity and practicality and becomes more a part of the culture. Ongoing in-school inservice that provides suggestions for practical application, discussions of the theoretical underpinnings and opportunities to collaboratively reflect, plan and assess specific elements of the change enhances clarity and belief while sustaining interest and commitment to the change. Rosenholtz (1989) found that experienced teachers were more likely to be isolated in routine schools as their teaching beliefs became firm, automatic and less subject to change. In collegial schools experienced teachers increased staff cohesiveness because of

greater participatory opportunities to influence school direction and to take on leadership roles. Through interaction with others, teacher leaders not only grow in their own instructional clarity, they are motivated to continue their own personal learning and in turn motivate others. At the school level, complex change such as creating and sustaining parent partnerships requires that the values underlying school decisions house the belief that direct, specific parent involvement enhances student learning and improves the school climate. If administrators and teacher leaders, through their actions, hold this vision and work collectively with staff and parents to define specific ways, then parent involvement will become part of practice. Fullan (1985) concludes by stating that

however change is initiated once it begins, it involves anxiety and uncertainty for those involved and (if successful) the development of new skills, cognitive understandings, beliefs and meanings. Whether the process is successful depends on certain organizational conditions that support and propel the process. Finally, leaders must alternatively and simultaneously balance and contend with several dilemmas, paradoxes and subtleties: simplicity-complexity, top-down/bottom-up, tightness/looseness, evaluation-nonevaluation and commonalities-uniqueness of the situation. (p. 404)

### Collegial Settings and Parent Partnerships

Teachers inherit the same images of teaching we all do, struggle toward proficiency virtually alone, and accumulate as much skill and wisdom as they can by themselves. Superb teachers leave their marks on all of us. They leave no marks on teaching. (Smith & Scott, 1990, p. 10)

Rosenholtz' (1989) comparative study of routine (traditional) and non-routine (collegial) schools supports the notion that collegial schools are more responsive to change initiatives and more open to direct, specific parent involvement that enhances student learning. She describes traditional settings as places where teachers "perform standardized tasks over and over, despite variations in the students they serve. . . . Teachers from learning impoverished settings (that is routine technical cultures) held little awareness that their standardized practice was in a large part the reason they performed none too well. There seemed little to learn and little to guide their teaching efforts" (pp. 105-106). Routine

teachers saw teaching proficiency as mastery of a series of technical skills and frequently referred to their teaching achievement as based on giftedness or on innate properties that were their personal resources. They, therefore, saw limited need for professional growth or inservice. When useful inservice was described, it usually focused on potentially interesting classroom activities or projects rather than on deepening teachers' conceptual understanding of the learning process.

In settings offering limited professional growth, learning to teach apparently means arriving at a fixed destination through the vehicle of experience. Teaching skills are at once predetermined and inflexible: if a teacher becomes familiar with textbooks and curriculum, paperwork and other routine procedures they seem to have learned their craft . . . . This conjures the view of large student batch processing. . . . Missing in the more learning-impooverished settings is the sense of teaching as a complex undertaking that requires an ever-expanding repertoire of strategies, that takes into account differing student needs based on contextual or population differences, and that matches particular teaching strategies with different requirements or purposes. Most conspicuously absent from teachers' consciousness is the primacy of tending to individual students' learning. (Rosenholtz, 1989, p. 82)

Lortie (1975) attributes this in part to teacher induction which is rapid and minimal with new teachers having full teaching responsibility immediately. This forces new teachers to become self-directed and isolated, often relying on their memory as students or their imagination which does not increase their technical knowledge. Teacher induction in this type of setting becomes a private ordeal therefore does not build collegial support nor replicate our understanding of how effective learning takes place. Most teachers gauge their success on their "general observation of students in light of the teacher's conception of what should have been learned" (Lortie, 1975, p. 74). In traditional settings, this can result in dependence on themselves and a view of themselves as gatekeepers over activity in the classroom. Lortie further states that in traditional schools the teachers turn to peers rather than to designated helpers. They don't deny utility of help but see themselves as independent individuals. Informal collegiality seems more helpful to teachers than formal

ones resulting in a tendency to learn the tricks of the trade rather than deep conceptions which underlie practice. In this setting, socialization into teaching is "largely self socialization; one's personal predispositions are not only relevant but, in fact, stand at the core of becoming a teacher" (Lortie, 1975, p. 79). The lack of a shared technical culture influences teachers' "collective status in two ways; they make them less ready to assert their authority on educational matters and less able to respond to demands made by society" (Lortie, 1975, p. 80).

Smith and Scott (1990) found that some teachers actively strove to maintain self-imposed isolation in order to protect the time and energy required to meet immediate instructional demands. "Their motive was highly professional: to provide the best instruction possible. Yet paradoxically . . . the long-term effects of isolation undermine the very instructional quality that this work strategy is intended to protect" (p. 11).

Rosenholtz (1989) describes dialogue between teachers in routine settings as consisting predominantly of reaffirming comments that strengthen rather than challenge their collectively constructed reality. Some teachers kept any efforts at understanding student/parent behaviors or finding solutions to themselves for fear of moral censure or concern that they might make others feel inept. Generally however, teachers viewed parents as adversaries often reducing or ceasing communication with them, thus substantially diminishing their opportunities for successful instruction. Complaints about students and parents were concrete, commonplace and made for collective identification. Teachers had the potential to bond with their less accomplished colleagues as they shifted responsibility of the intellectual growth of their students from themselves to the parents and children. This supports the old adage, "I teach them but they just don't learn". This is a particularly dangerous culture for new teachers.

In contrast, collaborative schools "stress norms of continuous school- and self-renewal" through collegially structured learning opportunities (p. 73). Rosenholtz' research indicates that "the greater the collaboration, the stronger teachers' certainty, which then circles back to strengthen their collaborative goals" (p. 114). In non-routine settings teachers

place more emphasis on feeling their way, on experimenting and collaborating with colleagues and principals, on developing more unique than standardized solutions to students' various problems. . . . Teachers from learning-enriched schools (that is non-routine technical cultures), continuously acquired knowledge, techniques, and skills, and were better prepared to grapple with the diversified needs of their students. . . . Collegial requests for, and offers of, advice and assistance increase the number of knowledge exchangers within schools, augmenting teachers pedagogical options in the face of classroom decisions and, in turn, their belief in the technical culture and instructional certainty as well. (Rosenholtz, 1989, pp. 105-107)

Leithwood (1989) refers to this as "teacher as decision maker".

This involves a process of reflecting in action as well as a process of reflecting on action in which the unique attributes of the setting are carefully weighed and the professional's repertoire is adapted in response to such uniqueness. As teachers gain expertise they not only know a number of models of teaching at a automatic level but their choice of models is based increasingly on defensible criteria (e.g. instructional objectives vs. need for variety and diagnosis of the instructional needs of students. (Leithwood, 1989, p. 4)

Collegial settings provide more opportunities for positive feedback from colleagues and administrators thus reducing teacher uncertainty and increasing self esteem. Lortie (1975) calls this the "shared ordeal where professionals work together toward solving problems; creating a collegial atmosphere and patterns of behavior, assisting occupational identity formation, fostering generational trust, and enhancing self esteem which does not exist typically for teachers. . . . [Collegiality] can reassure people of their worth and competence and can help people who work within uncertainty and ambiguity" (pp. 160-161). Through collegial experiences teachers have a better understanding of how shifts in beliefs can take place. This is significant given the shift required in developing parent/school partnerships.

Rosenholtz' research also indicates that another direct, independent contributor to teacher certainty exists when teachers work cooperatively with parents toward specific achievable ends and realize some benefit from their involvement. Her research supports the understanding that when teachers and parents work collaboratively both come to better understand the child -- enabling unique rather than routine solutions to classroom difficulties and reducing the distrust and distance between the home and school through the development of shared understandings and mutual effort. This results in greater teacher certainty about their technical culture and their own instructional practice. "Involved and informed parents focus their children's attention on the importance of schooling reducing the likelihood of their disengagement or misbehavior and instructional uncertainty as well. . . . Parents who are involved and informed hold greater respect for teachers which may augment positive feedback bolstering teachers' sense that they can in fact succeed" (Rosenholtz, 1989, p. 109).

Collegial schools also coordinated student behavior at the school level thus augmenting teacher certainty. Teachers in settings where behavioral expectations for students are clearly set and understood by parents and students are more likely to initiate parent contact when addressing behavioral problems. This contrasts sharply with routine teachers' willingness to invite parent participation in modifying student behavior. In routine cultures the majority of teachers addressed student problems alone attributing the source of their classroom problems to the students themselves. By handling the problem alone teachers self-esteem would not be endangered. Routine teachers also transferred the blame for children's attitudes and misbehavior onto parents. When parents are perceived as being part of the problem, parent contact is seen as serving no purpose.

Believing that the cause of the problem inheres in students, routinely situated teachers most often punish them. Believing that the cause of the problem is external to students, the non-routinely situated teachers tend to search for the problem's origin in order to find an acceptable solution. What is at issue here

is not just the problem but the extent to which it can be known, and by whom. (p. 124)

Teachers in non-routine settings frequently contacted parents to help them better understand the student's problem and to solve it. Rosenholtz found that unlike teachers in routine cultures, teachers in non-routine cultures seldom attribute classroom problems to the students or parents. Instead they assume personal responsibility and see parent involvement in identifying solutions as positive. Through collaborative interaction with peers, teachers accumulate a variety of strategies that they can share with parents in the process and parents in turn further strengthen the teacher's technical culture. In this way non-routine teachers tended to be optimistic. "Directly related to their optimism is the emphasis teachers place on pitching learning tasks at the appropriate level of difficulty, on properly paced instruction and on rendering individual assistance to needy students" (p. 119).

Woven throughout Rosenholtz' (1989) study is the significant role the principal plays in developing and sustaining a collegial school climate. Routine principals were frequently viewed by their teachers as uninvolved in the educational experiences of the students and teachers. This noninvolvement causes: teacher resentment of principals, problematic parents and students; diversion of teacher psychic energy and attention away from classroom instruction; and invites public criticism thus threatening teacher certainty. Principals in collegial settings because of their focus on supporting the enhancement of classroom instruction, offered more helpful advice and posed fewer threats to teacher self-esteem. Collegial principals marshalled parent involvement and support while upholding teachers instructional decisions and enforcement of school rules, largely because they were also their own.

How principals deal with parents in regard to student [social , emotional and intellectual] problems, then, has all the ingredients of a self-fulfilling prophecy. If principals encourage and help teachers to keep parents informed, to involve parents in solving problems and give them constructive measures to follow, reasonable solutions to classroom problems can be found. These actions strengthen teacher's beliefs in a technical culture and

their certainty about instructional success. But if principals merely placate, altogether ignore, or unintentionally alienate parents, teachers discover that bothersome students continue to give them the same disconcerting trouble, and all too soon they abandon their hopes for classroom and pupils' success. (Rosenholtz, 1989, p. 132)

Storey (1989) cautions us that principal's enthusiasm for parent involvement will not necessarily be enough motivation for teachers to enthusiastically embrace parent involvement.

since the establishment of collective bargaining in many districts, there has been a subtle shift in authority relationships within school districts . . . . Teachers . . . are unlikely to accept direction from school administrators as uncritically as they once did. They may draw the line more quickly than before, the line beyond which they will not go in the performance of their duties. (Sergiovanni, 1987, p. 198)

Nor will the case be made solely on the basis of presumed benefits for students. Unless parent-school interaction is defined collectively by the school staff and its administrators, even legislated provisions and prescriptions for involvement are likely to receive lukewarm compliance and support, at best. (Storey, 1989, pp. 97-98)

Factors that will significantly influence the development of an effective school based plan for increased parent involvement will need to consider current practice, the attitudes and beliefs of participants and the receptiveness of the school climate to change in practice. Principals will need to work with the staff and parents using moral rather than positional authority. They will need to collaboratively create a plan that will be specific, practical and one that generates commitment. Approaches for generating such a plan are being considered for Riverside Elementary.



## CHAPTER 4

### Facilitating Parent Involvement

An important factor in any partnership is to know what each partner wants and needs. Between parents and teachers this kind of understanding leads to more open communication, helps build better relationships over time, and brings about more positive learning environments for children. When parents are partners, the responsibility for student learning is shared. (Province of British Columbia, 1990, p. 119)

Inviting parents to take a more active role in the education of their child is a clearly stated goal in the recent educational innovations in British Columbia. Much of the current research (Fullan, 1982; Sarason, 1982) on educational change addresses the influence parents have in affecting change outcomes. It has also been shown (Andrews, 1987; Epstein, 1986; Seeley, 1989) that parents want more direct input into their child's education. The parent/school relationship is not clearly defined in the legislation, leaving it to districts and ultimately schools to create an environment that encourages partnership. This partnership is not without barriers that are entrenched in the traditional roles of schools and yet played out in unique ways in each school setting. Prior to workable partnerships being formed, schools need to move from the traditional model to one that invites collegiality first among staff then with the parent/school community.

The intent of this chapter is to sketch the approach for increasing parent involvement that is evolving at one lower mainland school. The chapter begins with a brief description of the school, staff and parent community to set the context. Some generalized observations are made addressing barriers to parent involvement. The collegial nature of the school is described in some detail, followed by an approach that is sensitive to the nature of the parent/school relationship.

### Description of the School

Riverside Elementary is a Year One Primary to Year Three Intermediate (kindergarten to grade seven) dual-track school with a student population of approximately 520 students; 250 in French Immersion and 270 in the English stream. Twenty educably mentally handicapped/learning disabled students are partially or fully integrated into the English classes as are the 13 E.S.L. students. The French Immersion program and the special classes were situated at Riverside when the neighbourhood could no longer sustain a school of its size.

The school is a large rambling structure characterized by long hallways, steep stairwells, five entranceways and portables. Over the past two years major renovations have been made to brighten and update the school. Chesterfields, plants and a parent news bulletin boards were placed in the foyer to establish a more comfortable and welcoming place for parents. The school mission statement is clearly visible to those entering the school. When the office was renovated workspace was created for parents and teachers. A coffee pot perks in the library for parent helpers. Parents rarely use the staffroom during non-instructional times.

The school is situated in a middle class neighbourhood; however, because of the special programs, a number of the students are transported to the school from outside the neighbourhood. The socio-economic status of the parent population is diverse, some students live in subsidized housing while others come from more affluent areas of the district. Many of the students come from families where no one is available to attend school functions during work hours thus limiting the number of parents available to become directly involved in school.

Parent involvement at Riverside is grounded in traditional roles. Parents demonstrate greatest interest in events that directly relate to their child such as Christmas concerts, sports

day and classroom celebrations of learning. The children seem to be the most successful at inviting parent contact with the school. There is currently a constituted Parent Advisory Council for the school; however it existed for four months this school year without a chairperson as no one in the parent community was willing or able to take on the role. Few parents attend the Parent Advisory Council meetings or parent education workshops. Typically a small group of parents participate in the school in the following ways: early warning monitors, library helpers, field trip supervisors and classroom helpers. Parents usually attend parent teacher conferences, particularly when requested by the teacher. Special service meetings are always attended by the parent(s) involved. Homework programs and at home reading programs initiated by classroom teachers are generally supported.

#### Barriers to Parent Involvement

The barriers described in chapter two in many ways typify parent/school relationships at Riverside. Parents clearly want their child to be viewed as an individual and to be nurtured through their schooling in ways that reflect the beliefs and attitudes of the home and their sense of what a good school experience is. Parents at Riverside typically base their view of what schooling should be like on their personal past experiences as students. As the teachers have become more involved in the changes called for in the current Ministry documents and as they become more a part of public information, tensions between the home/school seem to be increasing, confirming much of Fullan's research on parental response to change initiatives. Although only a few parents have brought their concerns directly to the school, the community information that is seeping into the school signals a degree of distrust, confusion and apprehension. Teachers are feeling the tension and some I'm sure are questioning the worthiness of attempting to implement the changes called for in

light of this added pressure. As parents move closer to questioning current educational goals and classroom practice, there is a tendency to want to close the doors on parent involvement.

At the same time, the relationships between teachers and the English stream parents and teachers and the French stream parents appear different. Many of the parents, particularly in the English stream appear hesitant to initiate interactions with teachers. They appear to view the teacher as expert and in discussions often take on the role of listener. Parents have approached the school in small groups indicating that they have had a number of neighbourhood discussions prior to bringing the problem or concern to the attention of the school. Much of the school initiated contact with individual parents has historically been the result of student misbehavior, neglect of homework or lack of academic success. French Immersion parents are seen by some teachers as placing greater curricular expectations on the school and appearing more likely to question classroom teachers about educational innovations at the classroom or school level. They more readily initiate contact to inquire about program goals, to request special services, to provide specific information about their child or to inquire about their child's academic success. They are more proactive in wanting their child viewed as unique and special. Issues of teacher autonomy and parent authority are more frequent in the French stream. This may be one reason why the French Immersion teachers at Riverside tend to be more traditional in their teaching style; their parent teacher relationships more formal in nature and dialogue with parents more frequent.

There are also barriers between the two parent populations that are attached to Riverside Elementary. Although the shift to dual track took place several years ago, the parent population has never succeeded at becoming a unified body. Issues such as traffic and parking are contentious and ongoing.

Unlike many lower mainland schools, the E.S.L. population at Riverside is very small. One need only interact with parents during registration, however, to witness the

concern and confusion these parents experience as they try to make sense of the new experiences that their child will be involved in.

### Conditions for Change

The following should be viewed as a snapshot of the changes underway at Riverside Elementary that support the development of a collegial school. They are briefly presented, subjective in nature and are not all inclusive.

The administrative team was appointed to Riverside Elementary two and a half years ago. Since then, all but four of the thirty-two staff members are new to the school. Of the current staff, two are in their first year of teaching, nine have taught two to five years and the remainder have taught for six to twenty-eight years. Some have taught in other districts while seven have taught in other provinces or countries. Heckman (1987) points out that "the injection of new staff or the deliberate selection of relatively inexperienced staff will help to change schools" in part because their view of the role is more malleable, their status more tenuous and their teacher certainty more fragile (p. 68).

The administrative team came to Riverside Elementary with a strong commitment to developing a collegial school. Extensive dialogue took place between the principal and vice principal to clarify the vision, develop a shared understanding of the change process and identify starting points. Over the past two and a half years, both the staff and administrators have initiated a number of changes in order to create a supportive collegial climate. One of the significant vehicles for change has been the staff committee. This committee takes part in discussions regarding budget allocations, staffing and timetabling decisions as well as addressing issues such as student management, resourcing and parent involvement. Ideas are clarified and consolidated in staff committee meetings prior to being brought to the whole staff for discussion and if appropriate, approval. The staff appear to respond favourably to

opportunities to participate and appear to appreciate gaining clarity and having input into the management decisions undertaken by administrators. Teachers seem to feel that they have some say in how the school is managed and consequently are willing to bring forth ideas and observations and to allocate their time to finding solutions. This supports Lortie's notion (1975) of the "shared ordeal (p. 160)" where teachers work together to reduce teacher uncertainty and increase their technical knowledge thus increasing self esteem and teacher commitment. Lieberman and Rosenholtz (1987) describe this as a professional culture where "collective action becomes the norm .... [and where] the meaning of teacher autonomy changes from one of protection to one of finding the ways to work on collective definitions of schoolwide problems" (p. 89).

One of the initial changes that the school undertook was to alter the procedure for student management at the school level. Rosenholtz (1989) and Doggett (1987) state that clearly defined and consistently supported plans for student behavior management increase teacher certainty and consequently are integral to the development of a collegial setting. The basic premise is that students are to behave in a responsible manner. This was described to students and parents orally and in writing and reinforced. Procedures were identified for addressing, recording and informing parents of problematic incidents. Parents are frequently consulted in shaping the consequences for their child's misbehavior and are involved in formulating behavior modification programs where the home and school work toward commonly shared goals. Periodic assessments are made through informal feedback from staff or through formal surveys during staff meetings. The staff reflects on what is going well and what needs improvement and works together to bring about the change. Significant to this is that the administrative team be seen as approachable and responsive to concerns.

A second initial endeavor that seemed to strongly impact on developing a sense of collegiality was the creation of a school vision. In building a stronger parent/school

relationship, it is important that parents take part in of creation of the vision and that the vision is seen as consistent with the primary function of schooling, and with the actions and interactions that they and their child experience. Riverside Elementary has created such a vision. The process began with parents generating and prioritizing the widely held expectations that they had for their children upon completion of twelve years of schooling. Through extensive dialogue the staff shared their beliefs, integrated them with those of the parents and created a school vision statement. The vision 'Caring for Each Other, Learning for a Lifetime' provided direction for the staff committee, school based professional development committee and for discussing expectations with students, parents and colleagues.

Riverside is currently undergoing a Ministry accreditation process. Through this experience the school will gain greater clarity as to the goals and aspirations that staff and parents have for the school. This information will be useful when the plan being described is adapted, adopted and implemented.

Given the significant number of staff changes, the staffing interviews were particularly important in beginning to create a school culture for new staff members. There were fourteen staff changes prior to the arrival of the new administrators. The principal was provided the opportunity to hire for the following September. This was important in that it enabled the principal to come in with a group of staff members that shared some of the same beliefs. Later, staffing interviews frequently included staff members who shared common goals for the school. The questions presented emphasized collegial goals, professional growth and positive parent interactions as well as beliefs about effective classroom instruction, management and school climate. By having teachers involved in the interviews, collaboration and respect for teacher expertise was modelled and staff commitment to supporting new staff members was encouraged.

Recognizing the need to minimize the feelings of isolation that traditionally impact on new teachers, a mentoring program has been in place in the school for the past two years. The program provides both teachers new to the profession and those who have made significant grade changes an opportunity to identify key concerns and issues and address them in some depth. The focus is classroom management and planning. A series of half days are spent in school based workshops followed by triads working on a peer coaching model again building on the concept of collegial support. Funding is provided by the district thus signalling district support. The workshop leaders are colleagues who are recognized for their expertise in the identified areas as well as for their commitment to personal growth and collegial support. This helps to increase the teachers' technical knowledge thus creating greater teacher certainty and a sense of mutual support and trust. It also provides opportunities for district level recognition of the expertise of the teacher leaders. During discussions regarding the mentoring program this September, over two-thirds of the staff indicated a desire to take part. The staff's response to the mentoring program mirrors the research of Lieberman and Rosenholtz (1987) where master teachers in schools moving toward a more professional culture are provided opportunities for an expanded role "that put teachers in positions of authority to help facilitate and develop learning opportunities for experienced and new teachers, building a potential for a whole new set of emerging relationships. . . . Collegiality and public dialogue . . . supplant isolation and insulation from one's peers" (p. 88). Riverside's experience confirms Lieberman and Rosenholtz' (1987) statement that "beginners who are offered help, and who see requests and offers continually modelled, are socialized to accept norms about the way in which one learns to teach. Hence, . . . novices more readily solicit and accept advice and assistance" (p. 91).

The vision 'Caring for Each Other, Learning for a Lifetime' represented to the staff the school culture they wished to create as well as their goals for the students and their



personal commitment to professional growth. Although the district has available teacher consultants who can create growth plans for schools, the school recognized the significance of those understandings and decisions resting in the hands of the staff itself. A professional development committee was struck and extensive time was spent in developing some understanding of the concepts housed in professional growth and of the elements an effective teacher growth plan includes. An ongoing school based plan was designed that included half day workshops, model lessons utilizing district and school expertise and collaborative planning opportunities. School funds were added to the district allocation signalling to teachers the value placed on opportunities for growth. This supports the notion "that commitments to the workplace and to innovations are shaped by the possibilities for active involvement in decision making, the sense that people govern and control their own actions and products" (Lieberman & Rosenholtz, 1987, p. 91). At Riverside the in-service needs were decided by the staff based on personal reflection of past practice, the school vision and available district support.

The professional development plan focused on improving classroom instruction, a focus identified, developed and supported by the staff. This supported the belief that our fundamental goal as educators was the intellectual development of the students. Teachers had access to personalized help through individual requests to workshop leaders and classroom adaptation of what was learned was recognized, discussed and honoured. The professional development plan was also viewed by the administrators as a way of uniting the staff and creating opportunities for positive dialogue about specific classroom experiences. In order to create as safe an environment for change as possible, parents were presented with the goals and rationale and provided the opportunities to experience mock lessons or view actual classroom experiences. Numerous informal discussions were held with parents in response to inquiries about classroom activities. It was important that the administrators

could discuss the rationale for the classroom changes being undertaken. Parents and teachers seemed to feel more comfortable with the changes in instruction endorsed in the professional development activities because of the direct, specific support provided by the district. The collegial model is based on the belief that we are all learners and that we learn best in a safe environment addressing issues of personal concern.

One of the strongest beliefs that the administrative team holds is valuing and providing opportunities for collaboration amongst staff. This is demonstrated through the numerous formalized professional development opportunities provided but also through less formal means. Teachers are encouraged to invite colleagues in to view or take part in classroom activities. For example, one teacher had invited parents to celebrate the learning at the conclusion of a unit of study. Other teachers were released by staff members and the administrators to take part. Two teachers had tried student led conferences and were quite pleased with the outcome. Staffroom chat generated interest, an after school workshop was held and thirteen teachers attended. A small group of teachers were to view a model lesson on a particular instructional strategy, interest was expressed and the group grew to fourteen staff members. Release was provided by teachers who do not have regular classroom assignments, by special services personnel and by administrators. These individuals also saw the model lesson and took part in the pre- and post- lesson discussions and thus were able to provide classroom support for implementation. As significant as the specific learning taking place in situations such as these, is the valuing of the learning and the willingness of colleagues to support each other in the endeavor.

One of the factors that make this possible is that all support teachers are partially classroom based. At Riverside this means that the learning assistant teachers, librarians and special education teachers work collaboratively with classroom teachers. For example, the intermediate special education teacher when working in the classroom may take the whole

class for a single lesson or series of lessons to model a particular strategy, to enable the classroom teacher to work with a particular group of students, or to provide opportunities for the regular teacher to carry out specific observations and evaluations. Alternatively, she may work with a group of students to provide specific instruction. A number of positive outcomes result from this model of support. Teacher isolation breaks down, while through a sharing of technical knowledge teacher certainty increases. The responsibility for student learning becomes a shared experience and parents when discussing their child's performance receive more consistent information. Teachers seem to feel more comfortable raising issues of concern in formal settings because of the informal discussions that have naturally taken place as teachers collaborate over specific instruction. Their observations become a collective view and solutions become a collective responsibility. The isolation that typifies classroom teachers experiences need not be the case in this setting. Problem solving discussions are more typically a part of school culture as more teachers are familiar with specific children in the classroom setting and feel an ownership for making the classroom an effective environment for the individual child.

When the school made the decision to provide classroom based support, a study group was formed which included all staff members that did not register a class. The goal of the group was to share strategies for effective classroom involvement and to discuss issues, observations and feelings resulting from the change. Articles were shared to help ground the change into a theoretical base as well as scheduling decisions to ensure that teachers were not overwhelmed by the number of adults in the room. The move into the model was gradual and incremental based on the comfort level of the classroom teacher. Ongoing meetings were held by individual support personnel, administrators and appropriate classroom teachers to ensure that the goals were clear and acceptable to all involved. Developing and

sustaining relationships and worthiness in the model continue to be focuses for those involved.

Maintaining close contact with district personnel has been an ongoing goal of the school. The district curriculum staff have been directly involved in the school in numerous ways over the past two and a half years. This interaction extends the base of knowledge, gains district recognition of teacher efforts and ensures that the direction set by the school is supported by district. At the same time, teachers seem more comfortable questioning school and district decisions as their confidence in their own expertise increases. Goodlad (1987) highlights the need for teachers to have access to the most current educational research and descriptions of how the research can be translated into practice. At the same time he recognizes that the day to day demands on classroom teachers make the synthesis and translation of the research an unrealistic expectation for the individual teacher. By utilizing district based staff and out of district experts on an ongoing basis, Riverside has attempted to help teachers continually refine their belief system while altering classroom practice.

The image this paper is trying to create is that because the administrators and teacher leaders at Riverside share a belief in collegiality, problems and decisions are addressed in particular ways and a school climate evolves. Becoming embedded in the school culture is the notion that those involved need to be informed and feel empowered to take an active part in decision making if the outcome is going to be successfully realized. This can and I'm sure is viewed by some as time consuming and requiring excessive amounts of energy. A collegial climate does not develop smoothly. Each player holds particular views of believing and doing that are based in the traditional roles and past experiences. These can impede the development of a collegial school and need to be addressed in a respectful way. Rosenholtz' (1989) description of feeling your way, of experimenting and collaborating to find unique

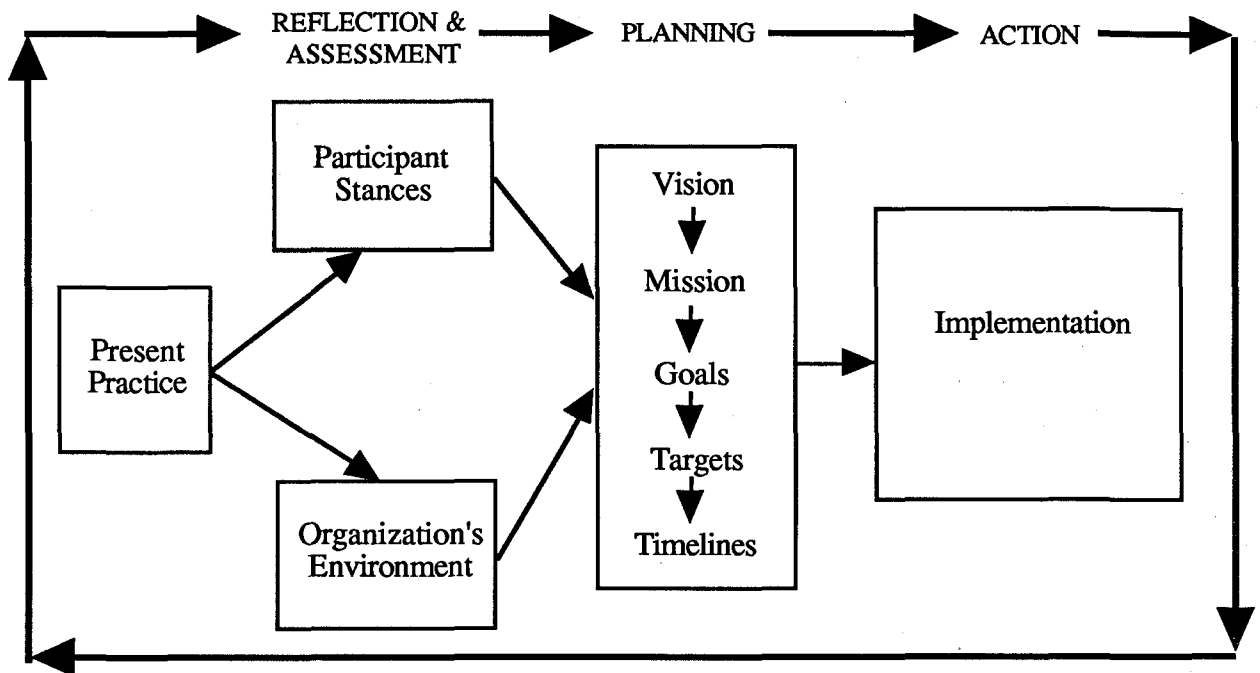
solutions that create clarity and enhance certainty describe much of what we as a staff have experienced.

### An Approach for Increasing Parent Involvement

As a collegial school where collaborative problem solving is becoming the norm, the teachers at Riverside are invited and take an active role in significant decisions that guide the school. Creating a school climate that invites greater parent involvement will need to grow out of a common belief that this will enhance the educational experience of the students. Before parent participation becomes a topic of whole school exploration, the staff will need to feel that it merits this commitment. Through discussions with teacher leaders, through valuing current opportunities that teacher's provide for parents and through infusing dialogue regarding parents into staffing interviews, professional development opportunities and day to day staff dialogue, teachers are alerted to the significance placed on parent relationships. These will provide a foundation for staff discussion on the validity of committing professional development time and teacher energy to modify and/or enhance the parent /school relationship currently in place. It is recognized by the writer that prior to adoption, the staff will need to feel confident the approach described in this paper will address a need that they have identified. The staff will have both the freedom and responsibility to scrutinize the plan carefully. The Parent Executive will also play an instrumental role in shaping the plan.

The following model developed by Storey (1989) reflects much of the current research on change (Fullan, 1982; Heckman, 1987; Leithwood, 1989; Rosenholtz, 1989) and forms a foundation for the school based plan. It proposes three stages: reflection and assessment, planning and implementation and is cyclical in nature. The model recognizes that institutionalization of goals are more likely to occur when specific plans of action are in

place. At the same time flexibility needs to exist, recognizing that changes in participant attitudes and school circumstances will inevitably influence the ongoing plan.



**BUILDING THE PARTNERSHIP**  
(Storey, 1989, p. 99)

Storey's (1989) model begins with reflection on current practice. The following is a summary of my reflections on parent involvement as they exist at Riverside. They are shaped by three of the four categories that Storey uses to describe parent involvement: liaison, support and influence. They are once again personal, subjective and should not be considered all inclusive. They will include only the less than typical experiences that individual or small groups of teachers have created for parents. At this point parent support and involvement though valued by many, has not been specifically identified by the whole staff as significant to the school mission nor supported consistently. The paper then describes a series of activities that a school might undertake as professional development in

order to generate greater understanding and whole school commitment through the identification of specific objectives. My reflections will become part of the data base that the staff might use when we collectively reflect on where we are and where we want to go.

Children have an advantage in school when their parents encourage and support their school activities. . . . The evidence is clear that parental encouragement, activities and interest, and activities at home and participation in schools and classrooms affect children's achievements, attitudes and aspirations, even after student ability and family socio-economic status are taken into account . ( Epstein, 1986, cited in Storey, 1989, p. 173)

Parents have two priorities; wanting what is best for their child and a need to know. The dimensions of the knowledge parents strive for vary (Epstein, 1986; Fullan, 1982; Storey, 1989). It may reside in knowing how well their child is doing in relation to the teacher's goals or more broadly to create an understanding of the school's expectations and a judgement of their worthiness. They become involved in opportunities for liaison, support, influence or control based on these two key motivators for action. Liaison is best when initiated by the school, when it demonstrates that the best is occurring and when it keeps parents informed. Support and influence occur "when parents begin to see that their involvement in school life might make a difference to the quality of their son's or daughter's school experience" (Storey, 1989, p. 134).

Teachers invite parent involvement when they feel supported and believe that the effort positively impacts on the educational experiences of their students. They continue parent involvement when both parents and students respond favourably and when the school climate supports such involvement (Epstein, 1986; Lortie, 1975; Rosenholtz, 1989).

Storey (1989) identifies home/school liaison as the foundation to creating parent partnerships and as the cornerstone to building credibility. Liaison provides the most frequent form of communication with all parents. It shapes the initial impressions and for the more hesitant possibly the only impression. The key is planning multidimensional

liaison opportunities with the goal of strengthening parent confidence in the school's mission.

For parents, the most frequent form of communication about the school is their child's observations, comments and samples of work. Through these, parents formulate an assessment of the competence of both the teacher and the school. It is important that teachers and administrators recognize that success depends on the interactions between the teacher and the student and on the tone and climate of the school. Administrators can support teacher efforts by explicitly demonstrating their expectations to students and thus to parents. Comments in student's exercise books and encouraging notes from the principal are two examples of simple routines that, over time, communicate and reinforce expectations. At a deeper level, the principal can work with the staff to identify appropriate shared expectations.

Teachers have the most frequent direct contact with individual parents. This liaison takes many forms: conferences, homework assignments, expectations modeled in exercise books and assignments, open houses and the classroom organization and presentation. These liaisons have new purpose when teachers value them as foundations to building a supportive relationship with parents.

Administrators make the most frequent contact with the parent population as a whole. This contact usually occurs verbally when addressing parent meetings and presentations, when responding to individual parent's questions or concerns or when interacting informally with parents who are in the school. When the principal holds the belief that parent confidence and involvement are significant to the goals of the school, these interactions have a welcoming and inviting character. Newsletters are a second mode frequently used by principals and can be an important, regular transmitter of the mission of the school and of the attitude that parents are important to the attainment of the mission.



Storey (1989) identifies soliciting parent opinion through surveys as the least used way that administrators interact with parents. Surveys alert parents to the notion that the school values their input and feels that better decisions are made when parent views are considered.

At Riverside, teachers incorporate many of the typical liaison opportunities into their routines. The following are some that individual teachers have undertaken and are being encouraged to share with their colleagues:

- o parents are invited to classroom based celebrations of end of theme or unit studies where students share their work and their understanding of what they have done and learned;
- o classroom based newsletters that describe classroom activities, celebrate new learning, introduce new students and suggest ways that the learning taking place can be extended at home;
- o at home reading programs where classroom libraries have been developed, parents informed of the benefits of nightly at home reading and given suggestions on how to provide support and children are involved in a home/school monitored process; and
- o student led conferences where students introduce parents to their classroom setting, share their portfolio of work samples and describe and demonstrate what they have accomplished and goals for future learning.

The administrative team has also identified specific short term goals for improving parent school liaison:

- o continue to encourage and support activities such as identified above and to model a positive attitude toward parent involvement;
- o to improve the school newsletter by continuing to provide organizational information while increasing the presentation of school experiences that support the mission of the school and by providing more parent education information;

- o to design potential questions for the parent survey in the accreditation process that would elicit information more pertinent to Riverside than those presented in the accreditation manual;
- o to formulate with the staff clearer expectations of exercise books, displays and classrooms in general; and
- o using the survey information recently gathered to create a spring calendar of parent workshops to address the issues or topics that they have identified as important.

Storey (1989) describes support as opportunities for parents to participate in the activities in the school and/or the classroom that aid the school in accomplishing specific goals. Support is controlled by parents through their availability and based on the value they place on the outcome. Both support for the school and support for specific learning make contributions to learning but in different ways. School support includes "logistical help, fundraising and advocacy" (Storey, 1989, p. 180). School support is appealing to parents because direct involvement is often short term and yet communicates to their child support for their school experience. By developing in children a positive attitude towards school, parents become partners in the education of their child. The task of the school is to keep parents informed, involved and feeling confident in their child's educational experience.

Storey (1989) categorizes direct support for learning as "at home support or classroom instructional help" (p. 180). When parents are involved in helping learners to achieve specific educational outcomes, the door is opened to a partnership (Epstein, 1986; Fullan, 1982). At Riverside, parents provide direct support for learning by listening to children read, supporting students at learning centers, helping students with specific classroom assignments and presenting information as guest speakers. Parents provide at home support in such ways as helping with homework and participating in the at-home reading program. Last year the at-home reading program was initiated. Parents fundraised

in order to provide money for classroom libraries and a budget was allotted to each classroom teacher. A local children's bookstore was invited to present their collection and then leave it at the school for students, teachers and parents to make selections. Information continues to be sent home with the books describing the rationale for the program, providing helpful suggestions for listening and responding to children's reading and soliciting comments from the parent and/or child once the book is read. An evening workshop was presented that reinforced the program goals, provided hints on book selection and ways to support the development of positive reading habits. In classrooms where the program is consistently supported by the teachers, parents have responded positively. Parents have welcomed the opportunity to be directly involved, appreciated the availability of the books and more have built reading into their nightly routine. This program is possible because parents provided support both at the school level and at the level of direct support for learning.

Storey (1989) states that support becomes a partnership when parents influence school decisions. "The extent to which opportunities arise, and whether or not they actually lead to influenced action will depend on the sensitivity and responsiveness of the school people with whom parents work" (Storey, 1989, p. 178). At the classroom level influence is usually informal resulting from conversations between the teacher and the parent. At the school level influence often takes on more formal characteristics. For example, each June parents at Riverside are invited to provide a written request for September placement of their child. The process for influencing placement decisions is formalized through the written request at the school level however some parents endeavor to strengthen their influence through informal discussions with current and upcoming classroom teachers.

Another example where the school has moved from garnering support to creating opportunities to influence is through the special services team meetings. Historically during

the meeting, the teacher and support staff presented their observations and test results to parents. The meeting would culminate with statements of what parents might undertake. For the past two years many of our meetings use a mapping procedure. Parents, teachers and support staff brainstorm goals, strengths, areas of concern and collaborate on the plan. Parents are viewed as significant members of the team and frequently provide much of the information. In this way, we value parents understanding and insight into their child and their role as a partner in their child's education.

Much of what is described above occurs because teachers have specific beliefs about the role parents should play in the education of their child. The changes described in the recent Ministry documents call for a closer relationship between parents and school. For this to occur teachers must have opportunities to reflect on their current beliefs and plan for the changes they are willing to undertake. Using the model of reflection, planning and implementation the following describes a series of possible activities which have the potential to elicit the information on past practice and current attitudes that will result in the formation of a series of goal statements and supporting objectives. It will provide teachers and parents the opportunity to explore their personal attitudes and beliefs as well as the values expressed in the new programs. Program values are particularly pertinent as teachers are now directed to be accountable for creating understanding and support amongst the parent population.

The goals for the exploration are:

- o to provide teachers/parents an opportunity to explore their beliefs and values about parent involvement and to reflect on current practice;
- o to gain greater clarity about the effects parent involvement has on student achievement and attitude towards school as shown in the Year 2000 documents;
- o to create greater understanding of the barriers to parent involvement; and

o to provide the staff/parent community an opportunity to identify particular objectives and collaboratively plan specific strategies to increase parent involvement.

Exploring beliefs and values is significant in that though often unspoken they determine our actions. Through understanding, we have a better sense of why parent/teacher relationships exist as they do and have some clarity into where changes might be made in order to move more closely to those values stated in recent curricular documents. The exploration will occur under the umbrella of the school mission statement and with the intent of generating goals and specific objectives. The goals will provide a description of the desired parent school relationship and the objectives will identify in specific language the means of attainment. Strategies for evaluation will be designed that address the specific objectives.

Fullan (1982) and Storey (1989) stress the significance of providing the participants time to reflect on present practice and to identify the beliefs and attitudes that shape that practice. The greater the understanding and clarity the participants create initially the more accurately they will be able to define the goals and set attainable objectives.

The following outlines a series of activities a staff might undertake to unearth their beliefs, reflect on current practice and generate goals and objectives. Although in the ideal situation the exploration might be carried out collectively by parents and teachers at this time I do not believe that teachers nor possibly the parents would feel comfortable expressing their views in such an open forum.

1. Have individual participants create written responses to the question, "What role should parents play in the education of their child?" Participants will share their responses with one other looking for similarities and differences.

2. Once participants have had an opportunity to share their response they would be presented the following statements from the Year 2000 documents.

- o "Parents have the right and responsibility to participate in the process of determining educational goals, policies and services for their child."
- o "They have the responsibility to help shape and support the goals of the school system and to share in the tasks of educating their young."
- o "Teachers recognize that parents are a child's first teacher and that a partnership between school and the home can benefit children, parents and teachers."
- o "When parents are partners the responsibility for learning is shared."

They will then be asked to complete the following T Chart:

Aligns with my beliefs

Doesn't align with my beliefs

Creates comfort

Creates discomfort

3. Chapter 3 of the Taking the Pulse video program will be presented. The school shown will be described as a school that has a high level of parent involvement. Add responses to the video to the T Chart.

4. The role that beliefs play in influencing action and in responding to change will be discussed through the presentation of three excerpts from research. Triads will be formed with each person responsible for reading one excerpt and presenting the information to the others. The excerpts could include Fullan's (1982, 1985) eight necessary and sufficient conditions for change, information from the Primary Resource document on parent involvement coupled with Epstein's (1986) work on parent goals for involvement and a synthesis of the research on barriers to parent involvement. Key points are:

- o Parents want to be involved in their child's education.
- o Beliefs influence decisions and relationships.
- o Beliefs are often based on past experience. They are not fixed. Movement occurs when certain factors are in place.
- o Change is a planned process.

5. Up to this point, teachers have been gathering information and reflecting on beliefs. They will now formulate goal statements. In groups have the staff describe what the school mission statement means in practice and then generate goal statement(s) on parent involvement. Post, discuss and come to consensus on specific goals. Goals may form around the following:

- o parent involvement in the classroom
- o parents as a school resource
- o parent education
- o parent advisory council
- o parents as an audience
- o parental support for instruction

6. In the same small groups identify specific ways individual teachers or the school as a whole currently addresses these goals and then brainstorm additional ways and add to the information. Post this information under the identified goals. These are potential objectives.

7. As a whole staff, reflect on each goal and identify specific objectives. Both the goals and objectives should be few in number and described in language that is action oriented. Storey (1989) reminds us that "unless we can be specific about outcomes and convinced of the vital importance of attaining them there is little point in stating promises.... When we are determined to achieve a desired future, we will be mindful about the steps we take" (pp. 109-110). Some will involve new experiences for certain teachers. Teachers also need to understand and accept their personal, emotional response to change in general and to this change in particular.

Where choices permit and interest is expressed create support groups and set a meeting time. These groups could be made up of parents and/or staff members. The

administration would be responsible for inviting and encouraging involvement, for facilitating, for sustaining the climate and for spreading the news of what is happening. Study groups play a significant support and monitoring role. Study groups provide teachers a forum for discussing experiences, addressing issues and problems that have arisen and for sustaining collegial exploration of the goal.

Parents would have the opportunity to explore their beliefs about parent involvement, to identify expectations that they have and to take part in creating and orchestrating specific plans of action. Activities similar to the ones identified for teachers would be designed that encourage dialogue and reflection on past experience and personal goals for their child. Opportunity will be provided for parents to clarify their understanding of the significant role they play in their child's education. Like teachers, parents can feel isolated in their role and through collaborative experiences and by setting specific objectives they can feel more confident and knowledgeable. This knowledge increases parent power.

At this point the approach is loosely structured with the understanding that before teachers address the complex multifaceted vision of parent/school partnerships, they must identify it as personally meaningful rather than mandated by the Ministry, schoolboard or school administration. The need must be able to withstand the scrutiny of the staff's search for practicality in light of all the other demands placed on them. Finally, the objectives collectively generated must be specific, action oriented and possible in order for concrete change to take place. I believe and research shows that complex schoolwide change is more likely to be nurtured and sustained in collegial settings. At the same time, in collaborative settings where teachers feel more comfortable in identifying concerns and obstacles, the initial objectives may not be exactly what the planners envisioned. The objectives will, however, have the potential to be more honest starting points based on the staffs' true beliefs and values. By supporting the committed, encouraging the hesitant and consistently holding



on to the vision, the administrative team and teacher leaders can begin to set a course with greater confidence that the desired outcome will be realized.

## CHAPTER 5

### Conclusions and Implications

This policy oriented paper resulted from the current educational changes described in the Year 2000 documents. More particularly, this paper reviewed present extant literature that addresses the creation of parent/school partnerships. Four questions framed the literature review and the development of an approach for increasing parent involvement. What are the significant tensions that exist between parents and teachers? What are the conditions for change related to the parent/teacher partnership that need to exist in a school in order for partnerships to be forged? What strategies can a school use to support the creation of partnerships? What conclusions and implications can be drawn from this synthesis of the current research on parent involvement and the adoption of a school based plan?

### Conclusions

The Ministry of Education has explicitly stated that parents have the right and responsibility to take an active role in the decision-making affecting the education of their child. They have the right to appeal decisions made by a board employee that influence their child's education, health or safety. Schools are directed to form parent advisory councils that can help to shape the school goals and their attainment. Primary Program implementation video programs distributed to each school highlight the significant role parents play in the adoption of new programs and depict to some extent the level of involvement the Ministry envisions. The tapes show parents welcomed into classrooms to assist in instruction and celebrate student successes. Within the school they dialogue with the staff and administrators about the goals of the school and take a leadership role in involving other parents in a variety of ways. The tapes demonstrate and the parents, teachers and staff describe positive partnerships being formed and sustained.

This view of parents as partners has been gaining momentum in the literature over the past twenty years. Research (Epstein, 1986; Fullan, 1982, Lareau, 1989; Walberg, 1984; Wolfendale, 1989) supports the notion that parent involvement positively influences student's social, emotional and academic growth, their attitude toward school and ultimately school retention rates. Research (Fullan, 1982; Rosenholtz, 1989; Sarason, 1982) indicates that parent understanding and support, significantly influences the success of change initiatives. Given the extent of the changes called for as a result of the Royal Commission it becomes apparent that the relationship between most parents and schools needs to undergo a restructuring of roles and more importantly a change in beliefs.

In light of the significant outcomes that can result from alteration in the type and degree of parent involvement it would be facile to assume that all participants in the new relationship would welcome the change. Unfortunately, there are numerous, complex barriers that create major obstacles to the formation of partnerships. This paper described and discussed five: individual vs. universalistic perspectives, socio-economic and cultural barriers, teacher beliefs, territoriality and logistical concerns.

Parents and teachers have different perspectives of their child. The parent wants the school to respond to their child's individual needs and the parent's particular goals and aspirations for their child. The school views the child as a member of a group and responds from a universalistic set of norms and expectations that the teacher attempts to administer in a fair and consistent manner. Tensions arise when either the parent or teacher attempts to bridge the two perspectives.

Socio-economic and cultural backgrounds of both the teacher and parent can also create barriers. Socio-economic status can influence parental goals and the type of relationship that is expected and accepted within the school. Issues of teacher authority and parent isolation arise.

Teacher beliefs about the type of relationship that they are willing and able to invite and support can create tensions between home and school and can influence the change process. Teachers with a cooperative stance are more open to parent involvement and create a tighter liaison between home and school for both the child and the parent. Teachers with a more isolated stance see parent involvement as interference. They have a stereotypical view of parents which can limit the teacher's view of what is possible for both the child and the home. The new primary and intermediate programs support a closer relationship between the home and school through the emphasis on teaching to the individual needs of the child.

When parents want more control over their child's school experience than is comfortable for a teacher, conflicts between teacher autonomy and parent authority arise. Some teachers feel threatened by parents who wish to have greater understanding and input into specific classroom programs. Other teachers feel isolated from their peers as they strive to create partnerships in a school where isolation from parent involvement is the norm. Traditionally, schools have institutionalized boundaries between the home and schools through the type of interactions that typify the school experience. Breaking down the barriers will require that teachers change their beliefs about the role parents should play in the education of their child. Self-esteem and confidence in their technical knowledge influences teacher's willingness to invite specific parent involvement and the belief that parent partnerships are possible and valuable to the learning experience of their students.

Time and cost become major logistical barriers to parent involvement. Most educators have not been trained in ways to invite effective parent involvement or had opportunities to develop understanding of the theoretical foundations to parent involvement. During times when major curricular changes are underway, it is difficult for teachers to see merit in focusing on ways to introduce parents to changes that they themselves are struggling to understand. Time also becomes a barrier as most parents are not available to attend

meetings or participate in classroom activities during working hours. The institutional layout of most schools creates psychological barriers to parents. Long hallways and closed doors send messages that the school is a private domain.

The changes called for in the Year 2000 documents call for a shift in the responsibility of educating children from solely that of the professionals to one of shared responsibility. This shift in paradigm requires a change in the culture of schools and in the beliefs and actions of the school staff and the parent community. The change calls for parent to have a greater influence on the educational experiences of their child and requires that parents understand and support their child's schooling.

Change in belief is the foundation to change in action. It produces anxiety and struggle and it requires time, energy, commitment and planning. Because of this, both teachers and parents need to feel that the change responds to an unmet need and that it is clearly articulated and supported in ways that are meaningful. Research (Fullan, 1982 and 1985; Lortie, 1975; Rosenholtz, 1989) indicates that collegial school settings are necessary for school wide change that involves changes in beliefs as well as actions. The principal plays a critical role in the change process at both the theoretical and practical level. Principals who effectively guide change initiatives within their school, hold a consistent set of values that underlie their statements and actions and create a school climate that respectfully encourages and guides teacher risk taking. Through the creation of a shared value system and opportunities for interaction, the staff supports a school culture that invites collaboratively planned change.

Riverside Elementary has worked for the past two and a half years to create a collaborative school climate. Collegial staffing interviews, alteration in delivery of special services, school based professional development, and formation of a staff committee are ways that the school has endeavoured to create a collegial setting. The direction is guided by

the administration and teacher leaders and supported by most of the staff. At this time the staff is beginning to consider the relationship the school has with its parent population. Parent involvement at Riverside is typical of most schools; a small group of parents actively participate in such activities as fund raising, library or classroom aids and early warning. The children are most effective at inviting parents to take part in school events and parents consistently attend student presentations, parent teacher conferences and special education team meetings. On the other hand, few parents attend parent education presentations, parent executive meetings or volunteer to help with school based activities. Concerns parents raise with the school include changes in instruction resulting from the new directions in education, student behavior on the school grounds and student/teacher relationships. I think it would be fair to say that most staff and parents are not fully satisfied with home/school interactions for a variety of reasons.

The approach this paper outlines is designed to bring some clarity to the types of relationships both the staff and parents wish to have, to identify barriers and to generate greater understanding of the roles, rights and responsibilities of all the participants. The approach is presented in a loosely structured format with the understanding that as teachers and parents become involved, it will be defined more specifically. The approach has three components: one is a professional day where the staff explores their beliefs, attitudes and past experiences; familiarizes themselves with the changing relationship as it is described in Ministry documents and then formulates objectives that will more closely align the two; the second is a similar workshop for parents planned jointly between the parent executive and interested staff; and the third is the formation of support groups to provide leadership, information and direction in light of specific objectives.

### Implications

The approach is not without obstacles. The first one will be the recognition of the need to create a closer parent school relationship. Although mandated by the Ministry and endorsed by the administration it will be the teachers who will decide if the cost in time and energy warrants a change in current practice. Clarity of the goals and a supportive plan of action can be designed only if the teachers honestly believe that the change is important to their personal goals as educators. Creating change at the level of teacher beliefs is instrumental to changing the type of relationship parents and teachers have. It is also the most significant barrier. Through formal and informal talk the administrators are highlighting the need for a closer relationship with parents and the benefits such a relationship could produce. Teacher actions that support a tighter relationship are recognized and other staff are encouraged and provided time to observe and dialogue wherever possible. In this way increased parent involvement is becoming more recognized as part of the culture of the school. The objectives that the staff collectively identifies may not have the depth that individual teachers, the administrators or some parents may wish for. Although this would become the starting point for the school, some teachers would adapt the objectives to more closely match their personal beliefs and practice. The role of the administrative team and teacher leaders becomes one of encouraging, supporting, modelling and probing for deeper levels of understanding and involvement. Parents similarly must see the need for this exploration in order to contribute their time, energy and commitment.

Opening the door to greater parent involvement in decision making affects teacher and administrator autonomy. Both need to be prepared for parental questioning and new demands. It is particularly important that the administration demonstrate respect for parental requests and demands and are perceived by both the staff and parents as dealing with issues fairly. This means that negotiation and compromise needs to be seen as positive.

Maintaining an atmosphere where teachers feel comfortable expressing their doubts and feel that there is concrete help available is very important. Administrators must also be attuned to the non verbal signals that barriers are in place and work with individuals in exploring their origins and outcomes in ways that are meaningful to the teacher and/or parent.

Some teachers will feel that they do not have the expertise to risk greater parent involvement. Paired ventures have proven themselves to be helpful in extending technical knowledge and in creating a safer environment. Utilizing the banked substitute days accumulated by staff will require an agreement on the part of the staff that this goal warrants this expenditure. As the district support staff has become a welcomed and valued resource for the school, it is reasonable to assume that teachers will utilize their expertise as they undertake new experiences.

Teachers may feel overwhelmed by the demands of the current curricular changes underway and feel that increasing parent involvement is untimely. Working with individual teachers to discover ways that provide a degree of comfort will require significant time for dialogue and concrete support. Some teachers may choose to transfer to another setting rather than undertake this new responsibility. The administration needs to be willing to accept these personal decisions in order to maintain the school's new goals.

A change in administration could strongly influence the success of this change particularly at the implementation change when leadership is instrumental both in nurturing the vision and addressing the practical aspects. Creating parent partnerships is a broad change in that it affects the whole school community and requires a shift in belief that takes time and thoughtful long range planning. It also requires a level of trust from both populations that again takes time to create. A significant number of staff changes or the loss of key teachers would have a similar affect.



There will always exist a level of creative tension between individual parents and staff members. This needs to be recognized and accepted in order for individuals to remain supportive of the goal at times when the other's expectations seem unreasonable or confrontational. The intent is to bring greater understanding of the different roles parents and teachers have and provide opportunities for exchanging information and expertise in ways that are mutually supportive.

Sustaining change is difficult. Over time and with the introduction of additional demands that continually surface in education, it is difficult to maintain the focus until it becomes institutionalized into the culture of the school and the practice of individual teachers. Setting reasonable intermediate objectives, assessing their progress and celebrating the successes are integral to sustaining commitment. These objectives need to be described in operational language in order for assessment to be possible. By stating criteria for success, parents and teachers will be able monitor actions and modify where necessary.

The model for evaluation is again loosely described as it will be dependant to some extent on the objectives the parents and teachers set. It is recognized however that forms of evaluation need to be agreed upon at the onset and that they will be both subjective and objective in nature. The evaluation needs to be directed both at the attainment of the objectives as well as looking critically at the appropriateness of the objectives in light of the overall goal. As the school currently has a traditional relationship with parents, the initial objectives may be largely at a liaison or support level. Irrespective of the objectives, the assessment needs to gather feedback from both those parents and teachers directly involved and those that are involved purely by being part of the general population.

Data gathering could utilize three formats. The objectives could be posted with the request that teachers and parents contribute specific observations and examples of evidence to support the objective. At a follow-up meeting teachers and parents would use the

accumulated data to rate the success of attaining the objective on a five point scale. Additional information would be gathered from the parent population through a telephone survey similar to the one being done as part of the accreditation to evaluate the parents' attitude toward the school. By incorporating the accreditation questions into the evaluation survey, a comparative study could be included in the final report. A third method would be to invite members of the district curriculum support group to carry out an external evaluation through an interview process. The final report would be made available for both parents and teachers and would be formative in nature. The staff at Riverside has been through evaluation experiences such as this through the accreditation as well as through the evaluation of school based professional development. Although time consuming it is seen by most staff as worth while in that it makes for greater clarity and practicality when setting new goals and objectives.

As a teacher and administrator, I believe that the closer a parent is to the education of their child the more positive the experience is for the student, parent and teacher. Building a closer relationship is not without barriers that are well grounded in culture of schools and the expectations of the community. At this time when significant curricular change is underway and when parent support is clearly being called for, research shows that both parents and teachers need to have greater understanding and confidence that collaborative efforts positively influence children's attitude and achievement. By addressing the barriers, plans and interactions become more responsive to beliefs and more specific to the goals of education. Through the exploration of the current research and my efforts to create an approach that is meaningful to all participants, I have gained greater knowledge, understanding and commitment to the goal of forging effective parent/school partnerships.

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